Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

H.C. BAILEY

Digitized by eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Abdul Haq.
Basant Bagh.
Srinagar

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

स्कैन्ड/Scanned

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Abdul Haq.
Basant Bagh.
Srinagar

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HIGHWAYMAN
THE GAMESTERS
CALL MR. FORTUNE
MR. FORTUNE'S PRACTICE
HIS SERENE HIGHNESS
THE FOOL
THE PLOT
THE SEA CAPTAIN
THE YOUNG LOVERS
THE REBEL
KNIGHT AT ARMS
MR. FORTUNE'S TRIALS

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

BY

H. C. BAILEY

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

First Published in 1925

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	The Unknown Goddess	1
II	The Water Decanter	11
III	Passengers on the Children's Provider	18
IV	Susan's Progress	27
V	Many Inventions	40
VI	The Uninvited Guest	56
VII	Mr. Twiss finds Friends	64
VIII	The Crossing of the Stream	77
IX	In Different Keys	85
X	Sir William is in the Way	99
XI	Sir William is out of the Way	107
XII	Emotions of Mr. Botynor	116
XIII	Miss Lovel sees the Vale	126
XIV	Mr. Alexander	130
XV	Meditations of Mr. Botynor	138
XVI	Miss Lovel sends Invitations	147
XVII	Miss Lovel Kisses Hands	153

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAP.		PAGE
XVIII	Miss Lovel's Hands are Kissed . .	161
XIX	Miss Lovel's Toast	167
XX	An Oak Door	186
XXI	Mr. Izod admires Himself . . .	194
XXII	Miss Lovel orders her Horse . .	204
XXIII	Mr. Botynor goes Riding . . .	208
XXIV	Brother and Sister	216
XXV	Sir William Zouch Proposes . . .	225
XXVI	Mr. Botynor is the Hero . . .	235
XXVII	Miss Lovel goes into the Garden . .	244

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

CHAPTER I

THE UNKNOWN GODDESS

MR. FETTIPLACE pulled his wig over the other eye. It was a gesture of delight, but delight was a condition so frequent in Mr. Fettiplace that he passed much of his life with his wig askew. Mr. Fettiplace took snuff and quoted Greek, his two favourite occupations. The snuff came from Rome, Cardinal Valenti's own mixture, the Greek from Homer, those lines in which the old men of Troy praise the beauty of Helen.

Mr. Simon Fettiplace was a little old man, like a bird in the face, and he moved like a bird in darts and jerks. There was hardly anyone at Lady Wittenham's rout old enough to remember him. He had not lived in London since Queen Anne died. But he was not lonely. He hopped about the rooms, much resembling a magpie, and enjoyed the emotions of others.

It was the spring of the year 1750. Lady Wittenham's new house in Arlington Street was mighty fine. France had thrown over the Jacobites and made peace at last. One could get the last inventions of Paris without the bother of smuggling. The gilt of the new French furniture and the glow of the new French curtains were not more splendid than the men's coats. The women's hoops had never rolled in such convolutions. But one woman took the eye.

A lean man, exquisite in orange and cream, looked down upon the restless delight of Mr. Fettiplace with condescension. "I vow, sir, we look like the fireworks in the Park. It's fortunate we smell something sweeter."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"A shining scene, sir," Mr. Fettiplace chirped. "I am like the Queen of Sheba. I see and marvel. Thy prosperity exceedeth the fame which I have heard."

Mr. Walpole sniffed his smelling-bottle. "From the country, sir?" he said in a small thin voice.

"I have lived thirty years in Italy."

"Great heaven, sir, how could you ever leave it? You must feel like the fallen angels."

"Oh, sir, a man's heart craves his own land."

Mr. Walpole made a grimace. "My heart is more civilized. Why, sir, if a man has known Italy, to live in England is exile among the barbarians. I protest when I came back, the only good things I could find were the newspaper and small beer."

"Your beer is not so small," Mr. Fettiplace tittered with a wave of his hand to the resplendent rooms. "Sir, I left London brick and I find it marble. I left you in homespun and I find you in gold brocade."

"Ivory, apes and peacocks," said Mr. Walpole. "Yes, we must be dazzling to a gentleman who comes out of the virtuous simplicity of good Queen Anne. But what would you have, sir? We are prosperous; we are grown rich. It is the blessed fruit of two kings from Germany."

"Sir, I give you joy of them." Mr. Fettiplace bowed. "You have good cause to be content."

Mr. Walpole shrugged. "Content? I do not know that." He considered Mr. Fettiplace quizzically. "It is an unreasonable country, sir. It waxes fat but it kicks. Oh, mercy!" He turned with a groan.

A large man had clapped him on the shoulder. "What, my old lad of Strawberry, quiz in the corner again! Fie, never be so coy. Set to her, Horry. Don't leave her to these boys. Show her a fine gentleman and let the wench look to her quarters." He pointed with his thumb at the woman who had a crowd about her.

Mr. Walpole was not pleased. Mr. Walpole looked up and down the blue bulk which held him and sneered at its jolly red face. "You are a good Christian, Zouch," said he with contempt. "You find nothing common nor unclean."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Yes, my appetite is good enough yet, I thank you. But you—man delights you not much, no, nor woman neither. But tell me, Horry, good faith, who is she?"

"Lord, child, how should I know?" Mr. Walpole yawned. "I have no acquaintance among milkmaids."

"Milkmaids, you fop! It's the golden girl! Look how she queens it! 'And in her gait the goddess shone revealed.'"

"An English goddess," says Mr. Walpole. "Of lilies and roses, two hundred pounds avoirdupois."

Mr. Fettiplace stood on his toes. "Sir, I beg your pardon," he cried. "The lady is my granddaughter." And he turned on his heel.

Mr. Walpole made a grimace. Sir William Zouch chuckled. "He has gone to send you his seconds, Horry. Egad, you deserve it. I always told you your taste was vicious. The girl's divine. But who the devil is she? And who is the little grandfather?"

"How can I tell? A returned exile. I smoke a Jacobite. A plot, my Zouch, a plot? The large girl is the Young Pretender in disguise."

Sir William contemplated her with a broad smile of approval. "There was never a woman more a woman," said he.

"Why, then she is the boy's *belle amie* sent to turn all our heads and make us strike for King James."

"Aye, she could bring him recruits," Sir William said, and considered her more gravely.

Mr. Walpole has written that she was large but very handsome. It is the praise of one who never loved her. Even he allows her "a great delicacy." There is a poem extant in which she is a daughter of the sun and that was thought happy. For the first thing in her which men of warmer blood than Horace Walpole saw was that she dazzled them. She was fair "and fairer than that word," lucent white, so that it seemed the sun shone upon the apple blossom of her cheeks and her dark lips. And the sun was in her hair, which fell, golden light, about her neck, for she loved to array herself in a neat disorder, she was pleased to see men's eyes glow, and took pains they should, or women said so. But she had her own delight in her looks and

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

would labour at new devices to set them off for her private eye, a happy creature.

"Lilies and roses, crowned with buttercups," Mr. Walpole said to himself as he looked with narrow eyes. "A goddess of the haycocks." She stood tall among the men; the body which rose from her hoop, revealed in close blue silk, had a gracious opulence. He could not approve that deep bosom, the strength of the white shoulders. But he began to discover subtle harmonies in her. The woman knew herself well and was perfectly mistress of her beauty. She had an ease, an elegance that smiled. There was music in her movements. Her colours were bright as flowers, but dainty flowers well chosen. "The wench hath a delicacy," Mr. Walpole confessed at last. He could not see her eyes.

"Mr. Walpole has put on his critical face," said my Lady Ailesbury.

"How can you say so? I am in the fashion. I worship —at the altar of the unknown goddess."

"Unknown? She is only old Mr. Fettiplace's granddaughter." My Lady Ailesbury, the best of women, made it plain that she did not approve of the damsel's popularity.

Mr. Walpole smiled. "You relieve me vastly, my lady. I thought the young men had all gone mad for her white neck. I see there is method in their madness."

"Oh, I suppose she is worth her weight in gold."

"But it would take a Hercules to carry her off." Mr. Walpole sniggered and made his peace, and they fell happily to abusing her.

The family of Fettiplace was old in Gloucestershire, founded on the wealth of a yeoman who turned wool merchant when duller men were fighting one another in the Wars of the Roses. While the meadow at Tewkesbury ran blood, Master Fettiplace was selling the fleeces of the Cotswold sheep to the weavers of Flanders at war prices. The family of Fettiplace had its share of the spoils of the great Gloucestershire abbeys and throve, but its women were fertile, and the great estate was carved into many portions. When King Charles and the Puritans fought for the mastery of England the house of Fettiplace was divided against itself, and those who stood by the King lost much for him and won nothing back when his son was merry at

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Whitehall. So Simon Fettiplace was born the heir to a little barren manor in the hills and a desperate loyalty to the Stuarts. He was a little boy when the last Stuart king ran away from England. He wrote mordant Latin verses against the Dutch usurper, he drank to the squeezing of the rotten Orange, he ventured into plots which never exploded, he was an ardent, dreamy Jacobite. Good Queen Anne came to the throne and he turned eagerly to the high Tories and dreamed of a peaceful restoration and bemused himself in their intrigues and wrote a shelf of pamphlets and thought he was a great statesman. When the Queen died untimely, he had his hour. With all his little weight he urged on Bishop Atterbury who would have ridden into the City and proclaimed King James. But the sons of Zeruiah were too strong for Mr. Fettiplace. When the Whig lords laid their strong hands on power and brought their King over from Hanover, Mr. Fettiplace fled. He was not subject to fear, but he had shot his bolt. There was no more vigour in him. He lived in Italy long quiet years dreaming and reading Greek.

Some time before his exile the once prolific stock of the Fettiplaces was changing its habit. Of its many branches came little fruit. Women of the Fettiplace blood bore few children; the men were apt to die young or marry late and leave no heir or none but a girl. And so the divided possessions of the family came back again into a few hands. Simon Fettiplace joined one good manor and another to his barren acres on the hills. He married young enough, a cousin who had nothing then, but to the one child she gave him before she died came by her mother's right broad lands. Mr. Fettiplace gave the girl in marriage to Julius Lovel, a Gloucestershire lad, who was wandering in Italy and had a nice touch in Latin verse and a pretty taste in Greek coins. That he had also a good estate did not interest Mr. Fettiplace, who would have given them all of his cheerfully, but was well content that his daughter should make her home under his own hills in the golden valley of the Windrush. But that home was not long hers. Lovel broke his big back hunting in the vale of Gloucester.

She for a little tried
To live without him, liked it not and died.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Her daughter Susannah was left a baby of great possessions. For the fates, having denied her father and mother, brother and sister, poured wealth upon her wealth. An uncle of Lovel's, who made a fortune in the Pay Office in Marlborough's wars, having at last to die, must needs leave all he had not been able to spend in debauchery (and the man's stomach was weak) to the innocence of the baby.

At the age of fifty-five Mr. Fettiplace had to extend his small experience of babies. Susan Lovel was brought to him in Italy, a round and jovial girl who had only one sorrow, that she could not walk. Mr. Fettiplace brought her up on two simple principles, that what she liked was good for her and that it was good for her to be kind. The natural geniality of Susan saved him from discovering any serious difficulty in applying these two rules at once. She grew to be a woman of a gay and happy spirit, smiling content at a world which gave her all things to her desire and contained no creature whom she could not win to be what she wanted. It seemed to Mr. Fettiplace that she was the perfection of womanhood. He delighted to find much of her mother in her. The marble fairness, the wheaten hair, the sweet temper she inherited from his daughter, from the wife of his youth. The stature and strength must be Lovel's, good lad. But sometimes her eyes puzzled him, those strange eyes, dark as deep water with gleams of brown light in them when she was eager. They charmed Mr. Fettiplace, but he could not tell how she came by them.

Active and intelligent agents of a nervous government had eyes for all the Jacobites in Italy. There the Old Pretender kept his melancholy court, there was the nursery of plots. Mr. Fettiplace was not accounted a man of action. He had borne no part in the Fifteen or the Forty-five. There was nothing the most ingenious could twist into a charge against him. But he had money, a rare thing among Jacobites; he had a girl to dispose of who was a match for the proudest man in Europe; he was marked dangerous. When it was learnt that he was bringing her to England, the minister at Florence sent off a courier with the news.

So before Susan Lovel was in England it was whispered among mothers who had sons to marry, and men who had

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

fortunes to mend, that the great Jacobite heiress was coming on the market and some gentlemen who did dirty work for the government were warned to see what the wench was about. If she had been as plain as the Princess of Wales she would have had a crowd of men about her at Lady Wittenham's rout.

It was a new adventure for her. In the quiet villa at Siena, which was the only house she knew, an Englishman was a rare visitor. She found these gentlemen loud and free, but it did not occur to her to be uncomfortable. She had never borne such bold eyes on her: she was well content and found amusement in making the most of herself for them. Such bold things had never been said to her: it pleased her to set one man against another and excite them.

Sir William Zouch, loitering on the verge of her court, watched her with a lazy, critical pleasure. A tall fellow, majestic in black, came at his elbow. "Why, Sir William, what's here? Who are these eager souls?"

Sir William surveyed him with a smile. "Argonauts," he said. "They seek the golden fleece, Mr. Lethenard. Don't you see her?

Her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece
And many Jasons come in quest of her.

What, aren't you coming too?"

"Who is the lady?" Mr. Lethenard looked at her over her courtiers' heads.

"Oh, she's a lady richly left. The gold is real enough. Don't you know her? She's a girl of your own county. Egad, she owns half of it. It's the Jacobite heiress, Susan Lovel."

Mr. Lethenard glanced at him. A moment passed before Mr. Lethenard laughed. "That will not be a Jacobite long," he said. "It's too prosperous. It's too happy."

"Damme, a husband should soon cure that."

"Do you aspire to cure her, Sir William?"

"I grow old, Mr. Lethenard. But come, I'll present you."

Mr. Lethenard seemed to have some trouble with his dignity. It allowed him however to make a slow and

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

solemn progress to Miss Lovel. "Give me leave, ma'am," Sir William was saying when he arrived. "It's a gentleman that was born your neighbour, a true Cotswold greyhound, Mr. Geoffrey Lethenard."

Miss Lovel made Mr. Lethenard a splendid curtsey. Then her eyes and her smile were for Sir William. "I scold you, sir. I had begun to know you when you ran away."

"That was why he ran," a young gentleman chuckled.

"No, George It was to let Miss Lovel know you. After which she must yearn for a man."

"And so you bring me Mr. Lethenard." For a moment she let her eyes meet Lethenard's. "Oh, I am vastly obliged and Mr. Lethenard is vastly proud. But I think I am not made to yearn, sir. I like myself too well."

"It's a sort of happiness," said Sir William, "but it don't wear—on a woman."

"Why, would you have me like a man too well?" she cried.

"God give your ladyship no worse fortune," said Sir William. "It's what you were made for."

"Not I. I was made to have what I want."

"Then you should not be a woman."

"Should I not?" She looked down at her bosom and smiled at Mr. Lethenard.

"Oh, it's exquisite, ma'am. But it is a woman. And you'll come to want what you don't find in this world."

"What's that, then? Not a man! Here are enough of the creatures and to spare. Fie, sir, you mean to be wise, which is the silliest thing to be. But I will forgive you to-night for you have brought me a friend. I came to England to know my own people of Cotswold." She turned to Mr. Lethenard; she held out her hand like a man.

All this time Mr. Lethenard had not spoken one word. He did not speak now. He felt her hand strong in his.

"Mr. Lethenard is dumb," Sir William chuckled. "Only his blood speaks to you in his veins. A sudden affection. But who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

Mr. Lethenard was roused. "Your talk is all out of play books, sir; you are like an old actor."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"It's these dramatic scenes inspire me." Sir William shrugged. "Lord, we are all actors, Mr. Lethenard, but an old fellow likes to see a part well played."

"And what is your favourite part, sir?" Miss Lovel struck in. "The melancholy Jacques?"

"No, madam," says Mr. Lethenard, "he is the honest ancient."

"Oh Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" Sir William puckered quizzical eyes.

But the gentlemen who had had the lady to themselves were growing restive. "Pray madam, why do you talk of Cotswold?" cried young George Montacute. "It breeds nothing but sheep."

"Sir, I was born there," said Miss Lovel.

"But madam hath a golden fleece, George." Sir William nudged him. "That's your answer."

"I must find a dragon to guard me, sir."

"Why, there he is." Sir William looked at the solemn Mr. Lethenard.

"Nay, if madam was born there it must be heaven," says another young gentleman.

"And I am a fallen angel, sir? Lord, I am to play as many parts as Sir William."

"I don't doubt it, ma'am." Sir William smiled.

George Montacute, a persistent youth, came back to the charge. "But why do you talk of your own people, madam? I vow, we are all yours, heart and hand."

"All? Oh fie." Miss Lovel hid her face behind her fan. "It's a temptation indeed. But I dare not. What's one maid among so many? There is not enough of me to go round."

"Lord, ma'am, a gentleman of fashion is soon satisfied," said Sir William.

"It's an old fox who has to say all the grapes are sour nowadays. Never heed him, madam. Put us to the trial. I protest you'll not complain we are satisfied too soon."

"Indeed sir, I can promise you that too," says Miss Lovel.

But Mr. Montacute's complacency was not to be put off. "Pray, madam, give us a crumb of comfort. 'Pon honour

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

now, you have not left your heart behind in Italy or France ? "

" No, sir, it brought me here to you."

" And now that you are here," Mr. Montacute was all smiles, " you are not ill pleased ? We hold our own with your pretty Italy ? You'll give us the summer in London ? "

" Now that I am here, I am eager to be in my own country. I go to Cotswold, sir."

Mr. Montacute gaped. There was a stir of amazement. Sir William took snuff and contemplated the grave face of Mr. Lethenard, which had grown pale. " Cotswold ! " said Mr. Montacute. " Lord, madam, the town's at its best now. Cotswold ! You did not leave Italy for that ? Pass the summer on a sheepwalk ! Egad, you will perish of a melancholy."

Miss Lovel made him a curtsey. " Pray take me to my grandfather, Mr. Lethenard," she said.

" A pretty pair, egad," says Sir William as he watched them go. " What's between them, George ? "

Mr. Montacute replied with an oath.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER II

THE WATER DECANTER

WITH a little cap on her golden curls, in a loose gown, Miss Lovel sat at the breakfast table of a lodging in Sackville Street and poured out her grandfather's chocolate.

Mr. Fettiplace was smiling over a letter. "A dear fellow," he murmured. "An excellent fellow."

"Yes, dear, everyone is," said Susan. "Which one is this?"

"You are a rogue. It's Will King."

"A good name, sir. A pretty omen. But is he real?"

"Madam, he is a doctor of divinity. He is the Principal of St. Mary Hall."

"And what is he for?" said Miss Lovel. "Will he teach me divinity, my dear?"

"You would make a fine figure at Oxford, would not you?"

"I think so," says Miss Lovel modestly. "Lord, sir, I am as good a man as most of you. Bid your Will King find rooms for me in his college."

"Fie, child, the good man is a divine."

"Why, so am I. You men often tell me so. Lord, sir, they swear to it. Perhaps I could teach Dr. King something more of divinity."

"Perhaps you could," said Mr. Fettiplace. "But I think Dr. King will not want to study under you."

"A rare fellow then. Pray, sir, what does he want?"

"He wants me," Mr. Fettiplace smiled. "He wants me to dine with him and drink a glass of wine to old days. A dear fellow."

It is not to be concealed that these barbarians were wont to dine in the afternoon. By two o'clock the first of Dr.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

King's guests turned into the Blue Posts. The doctor, who was reading a newspaper in the common room of the inn, ran at him and took him upstairs. They had not the look of kindred spirits, for the divine was jovial, exuberant, noisy, the layman grave and silent, of an austere dignity. The enemies of Sir Charles Monox pretended to believe that he was a descendant of King Charles the Martyr, to whose melancholy beauty his dark face had indeed some resemblance, and whose royal bearing he was said to imitate. Dr. King imitated nobody; he was far too pleased with himself, and looked nothing but a bustling, fluent divine.

When they were shut into his rooms upstairs, "All's well, my dear Monox. There's no mistake," Dr. King cried. "They are both in London. Old Simon will be here. He was very ready to come. A charming letter."

"You have not seen him?"

"No, no, I would not be too eager. Best to sound him first. Lord, it's twenty years since we met. But he's the same good fellow. He's with us; never doubt him."

To this conference Mr. Lethenard was announced. His spirits had risen. He smiled and was hearty. "Doctor, you are as rosy as a bishop. My dear Charles! But it must be a miracle that brings you to town. What does the subtle doctor want with us?"

"It is a council of war, Lethenard." The doctor rubbed his hands.

"You're like Mammon in the poem; your voice is always for war. But no matter. Councils of war never fight."

"Who can fight without an army and without a leader?" said Monox. "We are a feeble folk."

"Wait awhile, wait awhile," says Doctor King cheerily. "The clouds are breaking. We shall have men enough yet, by God's grace, and our leader will not fail us. No councils of war when we march, Lethenard. He shall follow his star; God save him. We are not the men to turn him back from victory. But the time for arms is not yet."

Mr. Lethenard yawned. "I suppose you did not ask me to dinner to tell me that. And by the way when is dinner?" He looked at the spread table.

"There is another guest to come. Old Simon Fettiplace is in England, Lethenard."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Fettiplace?" said Mr. Lethenard. "Oh, an old fellow that ran away when the Hanoverians came in. Yes, I saw him last night."

"Did you have any talk with him?" said Monox quickly.

"Did you see his granddaughter?" said Dr. King.

"Yes, there was a granddaughter, a large creature. I changed a dozen words with the old man. But why this interest in the family of Fettiplace? Lord, you don't look for that old fellow to bustle into a grand adventure. He's not the stuff for a hero, no, nor a martyr either."

"Who is?" said Monox.

"Maybe you're not a judge, Mr. Lethenard." Dr. King flushed. "Simon Fettiplace has been true blue all his days. He was deep in the plots of Queen Anne's time. He——"

"Queen Anne's dead, doctor," Lethenard yawned.

"He's lived in exile thirty years rather than live under a king from Hanover."

"Then why does he come back now?"

Dr. King smiled. "Ah, why? What if they have found out in Italy that England is ready at last?"

"Lord, doctor, if they have, is it Mr. Fettiplace they would send us?"

"I hope to God it is. There's no man would be more use to us in the west." Dr. King forgot that he was a divine. "What the devil would you have, sir? One of the wild Irishmen or the tricky Scots that buzz about Prince Charles? Not a man of ours would stir for them. It's only Englishmen can do anything in England. And Simon Fettiplace is the right stuff. He's shrewd, he's trusty, he has good blood."

"None better," Monox nodded.

"Why, man, if he came down to the west to work for King James we could raise three counties. Between Severn and Thames every man knows he is the best master they ever had. Great heaven, sir, he could muster regiments of his own tenants. And he's a rich fellow, the land's been nursed all these years, as rich as Beaufort, I vow. And he brings his granddaughter, there's the best match in England, to draw the young fellows in. And a rare beauty, they say. That's not amiss, neither. But you have seen

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

her, Lethenard, eh ? " Dr. King put his clerical finger into Lethenard's ribs.

" Yes, I saw her. I saw him too. I think you're sanguine, doctor. I think Mr. Fettiplace is not the man for it. I think he is not come back to drink to the King over the water."

" The devil take you, you always cry things down. We shall see. We shall see."

" Oh, that is what we are here for, is it, to see what the old gentleman's good for ? "

" I shall be glad to bid Mr. Fettiplace welcome," Monox said.

" Aye, a welcome home to England from gentlemen of his own county." Dr. King smiled. " To be sure, we must know if he comes with a commission from King James. And if he hath not, we must learn his temper. I don't doubt it, not I. I count on it we'll have him down in Cotswold, he and his pretty miss, working with us, but we must go delicately. Leave it to me. None of your sneers, Lethenard."

" We must have him with us, now he is in England," Monox said. " It would look very ill if he held off."

Mr. Lethenard did not dispute it. Mr. Lethenard would leave it to the doctor, never fear, leave it all. Mr. Lethenard wore a gloomy brow and withdrew from conversation. Dr. King was not troubled by that. He engaged upon a voluble proof that they could count on all England rising if the West Country gave the lead—the colliers had been rioting for King James at Newcastle, the drovers marched through the town shouting for him at Hereford fair. If only the gentry in the West stood together——

And Mr. Fettiplace chirped in. He was delighted to see his dear Will King, and they chatted together like children. Sir Charles Monox ? To be sure, delightful ! Mr. Fettiplace would have known him among a thousand, he was so like his father. Mr. Fettiplace remembered his father, just such a fine fellow. His grandfather too, old Sir James, who beat the Dutch guardsman in the park. Good faith, Mr. Fettiplace remembered too much. Three generations of men he had lived through, like old Nestor. And Mr. Lethenard ! They knew each other already. It was like

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

wine in the blood to meet those young fellows of the good Cotswold stock. An old man felt he was among friends, and he would see spring in the land again.

"God grant us all to see the spring come to England," said Dr. King. "We have had many a year of winter."

Mr. Fettiplace blinked at him. "Faith, Will, I have dreamed of Guiting wood and Windrush water years enough," he said.

"You've had your Italian sunshine, sir," said Dr. King.

"Oh, my dear lad, there's nothing in Italy like the apple bloom above a Cotswold stream."

Dr. King smiled and rubbed his hands. "Well, sir, thank God you are home again," he said, and they went to dinner.

When Mr. Fettiplace was well engaged upon a dish of eels, which the doctor vowed were caught and pickled in Gloucester, they came delicately to business. Had Mr. Fettiplace been in Rome that year? No. Mr. Fettiplace had no pleasure in Rome. See Rome and die, they sai l: rather see Rome and go away. A gloomy grandeur. Like the Latin language. Mr. Fettiplace had to make (very gaily) a confession he did not love Latin. He told them why at length. And the poor gentlemen looked at each other.

"You don't go to Court, sir?" said Dr. King.

"Court?" Mr. Fettiplace put his head on one side. "Ah, the poor King James. No, not I, not this long while. My friends are all gone. Alas, sir, he is king of the dead."

"Of many a loyal heart, sir," cried Monox.

Mr. Fettiplace smiled at him and sighed. "You remember him yet?"

"Oh sir, he is king of our youth, never doubt it," Dr. King said. "And he has a gallant son to lead them."

"Prince Charles?" said Mr. Fettiplace. "I have not seen him since he was a child. A pretty, gallant boy indeed. But I—I have lived out of the world in Siena. I ate the lotus and dreamed. England was very far away, sir."

Dr. King was not discouraged. He went on to expound that youth was on the side of the Jacobites, all the young men weary of the dull, old German king and the placemen

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

who governed him. If Prince Charles came again he would find all England march for him.

"A great adventure, Will," said Mr. Fettiplace.

Dr. King carved what he vowed was right Cotswold mutton, a saddle of five year old. "We are ready, sir, we are ready," he cried. "You are come to a new world."

"An old man," said Mr. Fettiplace.

Dr. King filled his glass with claret, a mellow Haut Brion. Dr. King laughed at his age. Look at him, his eye was bright as a kestrel's, and——

"As an owl's, doctor," said Mr. Fettiplace.

"The bird of wisdom, sir." No, never talk of being old. A morning in the saddle on Cutsdean Hill with the greyhounds, and Mr. Fettiplace would feel as young as a bridegroom. Dr. King hoped to God that Mr. Fettiplace was going down to Cotswold. He would find hearts warm for him there. They had not forgotten him, trust them.

"So I do, Will," said Mr. Fettiplace, and his bright eyes glistened and he said something in Greek about the dear land of his fathers. Yes, a man craved home in the end. And there was more Greek about the life giving earth to cover him.

Dr. King was eloquent upon the hills and dales of Cotswold. That corner of the earth smiled to him above all. A noble county, a golden land, and before God it bred the best men in England, lusty loyal lads and of a happy spirit.

Mr. Fettiplace listened, smiled and nodded, but with a twitch of his brows sometimes when the doctor's eloquence was florid, and sometimes he glanced at Mr. Lethenard, whose spirit did not seem to be happy.

"I hope to God you'll open the old house again, sir!" the doctor cried: it was his peroration.

"Why, I don't know that, Will." Mr. Fettiplace arranged his wine glasses. "I must bring my girl into her kingdom."

"Miss Lovel is coming to Ashcombe!" Doctor King leaned back in his chair. "Glorious! Glorious! My dear sir, she'll be the queen of Cotswold."

Mr. Fettiplace laughed happily.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The doctor filled his glass. "Gentlemen, that cries for a toast. Miss Lovel! A bumper for Miss Lovel."

Monox bowed gravely to Mr. Fettiplace. "Miss Lovel, sir." Lethenard held up his glass. He did not speak.

"But faith, we've forgotten," Doctor King cried. "No matter. His Majesty will forgive us. The King, sir." He passed his glass over the water decanter and smiled. "The King, God bless him."

Mr. Fettiplace stood up. Mr. Fettiplace leaned. He too passed his glass over the water decanter. "The King," he said, and drank.

Dr. King lay back in his chair and smiled and rubbed his hands and sent the wine round and nodded triumph at his two allies. But Mr. Lethenard did not see him. Mr. Lethenard was heavy with his own thoughts.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER III

PASSENGERS ON THE CHILDREN'S PROVIDER

IN the brown water of the King's Road, the "Children's Provider" let go her anchor to wait for the tide. Her captain, eyes red and bleared for lack of sleep, stretched himself and grinned at the passenger on the poop. "We'm here for a spell, Mr. Botynor. Will 'e have a boat to go ashore?"

"Lord, no. I am well enough here."

"You'm no sailor, sir. You see a beach and you don't want to land! You'm a tranquil man, Mr. Botynor, God bless you." He rolled to the companion and vanished.

The schooner was weather worn. Her rigging hung slack and grey, her blue hull was mottled, the bulwarks twisted and broken. She came from Bordeaux, with claret and cognac for the wine merchants of Gloucester. She found dirty weather in the Bay and brought it back with her to Portishead. From the Wolf she had run before a south wester and Captain Porteous and his weary crew, who had not been dry nor tasted hot food for a week, were hard put to it to claw off Pentire, and in the rain of a dark night nearly ran her up on the Bridgwater sands. They lay worn out and the forecastle rumbled with their snores. But Mr. Botynor, who had missed none of the worst of it and borne a ready hand to any rope that needed him, swung round the deck in a measured orbit, rosy and benign.

From the companion rose slowly a large head decorated with a limp, damp hat and a wig out of curl. The face beneath was yellow and aggrieved. "What is it now, Mr. Botynor?" it said. "What's come to us?"

"What, my Twiss, are you still alive? Come up and I will show you a thing."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Mr. Twiss climbed painfully upon the deck, holding himself together about the middle. He gulped.

"Now, now," Mr. Botynor rebuked him. "It's impossible you should be sick again. You can have nothing left. Look up, man. That's land, firm land." He pointed across the mud banks to the blue wooded hills.

"Praise God," said Mr. Twiss. His large face, which had almost no nose, was not adapted to the expression of devotion, but he was fervently sincere. "Faith, the ship was so still and quiet, I couldn't tell what had come to us. Ah, it was a fearful passage, Mr. Botynor." His knees gave and he held on by the mast. "But are we there now?"

"No, we're here. Still afloat, Mr. Twiss. And that's a wonder by the Lord. You must have brought us luck."

"Luck do you say?" Mr. Twiss groaned. "Oh God."

"He that is born to be hanged will never be drowned."

"Mr. Botynor, sir!" Mr. Twiss jerked himself together. "What the devil do you mean by that?"

"It's a high destiny, Mr. Twiss. Have you no ambition?"

"I have, faith. To be on land again, that's my ambition."

"Why?"

"Why? The man asks me why!" Mr. Twiss swayed with emotion. "My God, I want to eat a dinner that won't rise on me. I have had no food that has stayed with me this week."

"Faith, you have been wonderful," Peter Botynor chuckled. "I never saw anything like it. But we have a long way to go yet. That's not Gloucester, not by thirty mile of water." Mr. Twiss groaned. "Lord, man, it's no matter. The ship is steady enough here. Come down to the cabin. There's a sound piece of salt beef in cut."

"Salt beef is it?" Mr. Twiss shuddered. "I thank ye, not for me. I go ashore." He looked round the silent deck. "And where the devil's all the men?"

"Dead with sleep. You'll not get a boat this four hours."

"Ah, the lazy rogues, I'll rouse them out."

"Not if you were the last trumpet. Lazy, are they? Good God, they have near killed themselves to bring you

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

over, Mr. Twiss. I hope you're worth it. What's your hurry?"

Mr. Twiss scowled. "I'll thank ye to be civil with me, Mr. Botynor. I know what I'm worth and I'll be happy to teach you when I meet you ashore. And for my hurry, every gentleman has his own affairs. I'll mind mine, and I'll ask you to mind yours."

"I do, my Twiss," Mr. Botynor smiled. "That is why I am coming with you to Gloucester."

The small eyes of Mr. Twiss contracted. His truculence was quenched. "Faith, we must crack a bottle together when we're ashore," he said eagerly. "You'll be staying in Gloucester, sir?"

"As long as you please. I am in no hurry."

"Then I'll count on you, Mr. Botynor. We'll be merry." He nodded and winked. "I wish we were there now, sir. It's dull enough here, my soul it is; I'll go try for a wink of sleep."

Mr. Botynor did not try to keep him. He did not interest Mr. Botynor, who was however moved to remark that the creature seemed peevish. Mr. Botynor revolved in his orbit in the sunshine, thinking about himself, as is good for youth. But he was not feeling young.

It was not clear to Mr. Botynor that he wanted to be where he was, and upon careful reflection he was not sure why he was there. Peter Botynor in the year of the Lord 1750 had attained the age of twenty-five and freedom from every human tie except a married sister. Yet he was a youth of decent estate and pleasant aspect. His complaint against nature was that she gave him a face which would not grow up, perennially round and rosy as a baby's. Below that plump benignity he was solid, but he moved quickly. Inside it, as he was always pleased to argue, was the mind of an old man, calm, sage, judicial. He had escaped from the superintendence of his sister to make the grand tour. At the end of a year he was still wandering in Provence when a letter reached him from his sister, which bade him come home. It gave no reasons, unless description of the goodness of her husband and the charms of her child were reasons. But Peter Botynor was docile: he turned from the contemplation of the handsome

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

women of Arles and prepared to obey Lady Monox. He did not think it would be good for her ladyship to hurry. So he chose to go by sea, and on the way to Bordeaux fell in with a Mr. Twiss who called himself English and was certainly Irish. They did not take to each other. Mr. Twiss was not in the least pleased when they met again at Bordeaux. Mr. Twiss showed some acrimony when they found themselves together aboard the " Children's Provider." But from the time the schooner crossed the bar of the Gironde till she let go her anchor in the King's Road, Mr. Twiss had not been in society.

Peter Botynor, revolving in the sunshine, thought with regret of the comely girls of Arles : wondered why he had come home : wondered why my lady wanted him. Probably to show her power. Dorcas, beautifully meek to her husband, always liked to be in command of her brother. A perverse taste. Peter Botynor had never wanted to be in command of anybody. He felt a gentle contempt for his sister. He felt old and wise. It occurred to him that he was sleepy. He sought his cabin, and on the " Children's Provider " all was still.

When Mr. Botynor woke up, he heard the wash of water. The schooner was moving through the dark on the flood tide with a light breeze abeam. Mr. Botynor climbed on deck and breathed deep. The cabins of the " Children's Provider " were too fragrant. In the stern the round face of Captain Porteous gleamed like the moon to the compass lantern. Captain Porteous grinned. " You'm had your sleep out ? Us didn't rouse 'e. 'E said 'e had no mind to go ashore. Mr. Twiss he'm gone. Reckon he was glad to go."

" Yes, I dare say he was," said Mr. Botynor. For the first time he felt a little interest in Mr. Twiss. The gentleman was strangely nervous. Even he could not hope to be sea-sick on the river. If he was going to Gloucester, he would not gain much by landing on the mud of Avonmouth, a mighty long walk from an inn or a horse. But if the good man was not going to Gloucester, why the devil did he engage for a dinner there ? " ' Nobody asked you, sir,' she said." Mr. Botynor hummed. " Why did you ask me ? Because I quizzed you about your business and you

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

wanted to keep me quiet ? As if I cared what your business might be ! . . . You didn't like my going to Gloucester. Confound you, you had the impudence to think I was curious about you. . . . So you run away from me to be there first. The wicked flee when no man pursueth. . . . Pursueth ! I should go the other way. You are a wicked flea, my Twiss. Go to the devil." Mr. Botynor was more annoyed than he liked to be, for he had a genial temper and he prided himself on his lack of interest in other people.

But the schooner was yawing and rolling in the swirling, broken water of the Shoots, and Mr. Botynor turned to watch Captain Porteous work her up the narrowing channel, which he seemed to do by inspiration, for Peter Botynor could make out no landmark, till he found her close upon a long spit of shore on which a blockhouse loomed through the night. When he thought she must strike, the point slipped by and she was in calm water again with no land in sight. Mr. Botynor went down to supper with a mind cleared from memories of Mr. Twiss. He was, perhaps, not so old as he thought.

In the morning the " Children's Provider " lay at anchor in a channel of glittering grey water which wound among yellow sand-banks broken here and there by other narrower streams, and the red Gloucestershire shore stood close. Mr. Botynor poured to Captain Porteous a libation of the schooner's wonderful brandy and got his saddle bags into a boat and landed on Parton hard.

The wide Severn valley was aglow with light and the wooded hills east and west stood dim as though they were shadows of haze over a boundless plain. Peter Botynor rode on by meadows of dark deep grass and old hedgerows white and fragrant and little twisted fields in which the young wheat rippled like green water. It was not long after noon before the scarp of the Cotswolds closed upon him and he looked up to the steep slope and laughed and waved his hand to the hills that were his own. He saw the tower of Gloucester soaring up through the sunshine, a fantasy in silver, above the crowded houses, and spurred on till his horse was clattering on the kidney stones of Southgate among the creaking sledges. He rode into the

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

cheery courtyard of the Fleece and was soon eating [illegible] salmon and Hereford beef again.

As he emptied his tankard another gentleman came into the room and hastily went out again. He recognized the large face and the flat nose of Mr. Twiss. "This creature is to haunt me," said Peter Botynor with disgust. But when he went out into the courtyard to smoke a pipe Mr. Twiss was not there. Mr. Twiss was not staying at the inn. He had ridden up, asked what company they had, looked in and gone away. "It's entirely like him," said Mr. Botynor. "A fluttering creature": and again cleared his mind of Mr. Twiss, and having smoked his pipe strolled into College Green to call on one of the canons who had been his schoolmaster.

It was growing dark when he left Canon Knipe. The cathedral loomed huge and vague to a lowering sky. The precincts were empty and silent. Mr. Botynor made across the green for the narrow way of College Court. He had come into its gloom when some fellows entered it from the other end roystering. One of them or all were in liquor, and their mirth defiled the night. Peter Botynor, a man of peace, drew under the wall to wait till they removed themselves. But they had already fallen to quarrelling. There was a push and a scuffle, one had another by the throat, a sword was out, they grappled, a knife flashed. Mr. Botynor heard a yell, and the voice was the voice of Mr. Twiss. It was Mr. Twiss who was down and the others stifling him.

"My wicked flea," said Mr. Botynor with disgust. But he ran up the court. "Gentlemen, there are too many of you," he cried, and knocked one head against another. Their owners, who were pillaging the supine Mr. Twiss, rolled together amid oaths, another flung himself on Mr. Botynor, who had to grip at a hand with a knife in it. He slipped away from the fellow and got his sword out and made play. His point found something that was tender. A scream came out of the dark: "Dog on it, off then," a hoarse voice grunted. The stones clattered to heavy shoes. Peter Botynor found himself alone with Mr. Twiss, who gasped.

"Who are your kind friends, my Twiss?" said Mr.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Botynor. But Mr. Twiss, lying still, was occupied with breathing. Peter Botynor also gasped. It would be very tiresome of Mr. Twiss to die: but exactly like him. So Mr. Botynor reflected, but he knelt by the man and handled him gently enough. Mr. Twiss was bleeding. Mr. Twiss had wounds in his chest and his throat, but it did not seem likely that he would die.

Groaning that he could not stand, he stood and was led tottering into Westgate. By that time he was able to perceive through his woes that it was the arm of Mr. Botynor which supported him. He quivered at the discovery. "You!" He stopped. "You, sir? What were you doing there?" His voice was still encumbered with liquor.

"I was drinking tea with the clergy," said Peter Botynor. "I fear you were not, my Twiss."

Mr. Twiss did not seem to hear him. "You were not at the tavern," he said reproachfully. "I didn't see you at the tavern. I'll swear you were not at the tavern."

"No, sir. Which is your tavern?"

"It was not my tavern," said Mr. Twiss with indignation. He had gone to it, and he did not know the name of it, to drink a glass of brandy with a fellow, and there were other fellows and all mighty merry, the devil afflict them. That was the way of it.

"Wine is a mocker," said Peter Botynor. "And which is your tavern? Do you know that?"

He did. He was at "The Ram." And Peter Botynor had much trouble to get him there. He was very angry with Mr. Botynor. He was bitter against all the world. And when at last Peter Botynor left him in bed quarrelling with the surgeon, he had inspired such dislike as the suffering only can do.

It was not the end of Mr. Twiss. While he ate a chicken pie for breakfast Peter Botynor was disturbed by the landlord of "The Ram," who said that the gentleman had waked in a high fever and was calling for him and would not be quiet.

"Great heaven," said Peter Botynor. "What now?" The landlord thought the gentleman had something on his mind. "It would be exactly like him," said Peter Botynor. "A last dying speech and confession."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Oh, sir, God forbid," the landlord cried.

"I hope so." Peter Botynor agreed fervently.

Mr. Twiss was not a pleasant sight. His large face was swollen with bruises and of many colours; his eyes were inflamed. "Ah, you've come, have you?" he growled, and he dragged himself up on his pillows. "It's as well. I'll be glad of a word with you, Mr. Botynor." He reached for a mug of small ale and drank greedily. It was plain that confession was not what he had in mind. "Tell me now, what do you know about these fellows?"

"I didn't take to them, my Twiss. I don't care for your taste in friends."

"Friends, is it? The devil fly away with them. I had never seen them till last night. I suppose you wouldn't know them again, Mr. Botynor?"

"I hope not. I think not. It was as black as your eye, that court."

"Ay, it was dark enough. A queer place for you to be, sir. Faith, it was mighty lucky you were there all ready for me."

Peter Botynor did not care for his tone. "Who was lucky, sir?"

Mr. Twiss scowled. "I am mighty grateful to you indeed. I had a hundred pound taken off me there in the court. Faith, some one knew what he was about."

"You have a gift for making friends," said Peter Botynor, and he rose. "Your servant, sir."

Mr. Twiss clutched at his arm. "Look, now. It's not the money I care for. The devil go with it! There was some papers I had. Tell me now, do you know which way they went? Ah, wait now, wait, I would pay a price for them and ask no questions neither."

Peter Botynor plucked his arm away with some violence. He stared at Mr. Twiss and he burst out laughing. "Alas, my poor Twiss, I have not the honour to be a thief. I have no talent for the profession. I cannot think you have much for yours. Your money, your papers—tell me, where is the last year's snow? You should ask your friends. But I think you had better go back where the papers came from. And I wish you a happy issue out of all your afflictions."

"Mr. Botynor, sir——"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

But Peter Botynor was gone. He took horse and rode out of Gloucester and away across the vale, and still he suffered from amusement and irritation at the impudence of Mr. Twiss. "Now a certain man fell among thieves," said he. "I wonder if he said the Samaritan had contrived it when he came to."

The hills rose sheer and bare before him. He came out of the saddle to trudge up the long climb to Birdlip, going with a larger stride as it steepened against him, till on the turf at the top he lay and drank in the keen air and looked far across the dim levels of the glittering river. A good land—but not his own. He mounted and rode on into the long waves of the hills, where no more than a narrow band of beeches along the roadside broke the naked curves of the down land. And he forgot Mr. Twiss and sang as he rode:

Mine hostess's maid, and her name 'twere Nell,
A pretty wench and I loved her well;
I loved her well, good reason why,
Because she loved my dog and I.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER IV

SUSAN'S PROGRESS

A COACH and six rumbled over Magdalen Bridge and drew the eyes of two gentlemen commoners who, with velvet caps upon their flaxen wigs and silk gowns standing stiff in the breeze from their white stockings, were sauntering to Lyne's coffee house. For Miss Lovel was looking out of the coach window. "Gad, my Julius, a brave wench, a Millamant," says one, and the other put up a glass to look at her. "It's buxom," he agreed. "Who is it? A nabob's daughter?" For Miss Lovel's coach swung luxurious, and it was blue and gold, blazoned with the arms of the Lovels and the Fettiplaces, and two grooms went before and two footmen sat behind, and Sir Charles Monox rode stately beside.

The coach rolled on down the High and stopped before St. Mary Hall.

"Skimmery!" said the Magdalen man with contempt. "The damsel hath a lowly taste, Julius."

"Nay, King is a gentleman."

"Look at him, the rogue!"

Dr. King came out of the lodge all bows and smiles, and Miss Lovel was led with royal honours to the principal's lodging. "Madam, my poor rooms have never looked so mean." The doctor put on a rueful face. "They are not fit for sunshine. Forgive a poor scholar who was ambitious your grace should be his guest."

"He wishes I had not come," says Miss Lovel, who had no taste for the florid style. She sat herself down in an ample chair. "You are a scholar who has studied comfort." She looked round the pleasant dark room. "Fie, doctor, your ambition has betrayed you. I was easy to

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

win. What if I am hard to lose? I think I shall not ever leave this chair."

"Madam, I would have you sit there for ever," the doctor cried, "if I had not to pray you come to dinner."

"The man knows me too well." Miss Lovel rose slowly. "He appeals to my baser part. The man tempted me and I did eat. Sir, your obliged servant."

When she came down from her room she found a company assembled. Dr. King had chosen it with care. He had the head of Brasenose and other trusty Jacobites of the dons, he found room for some undergraduates of title, he brought in half a dozen squires, all true blue. University and countryside and the great families beyond were to know that Miss Lovel had brought herself and her fortune to the party.

And Miss Lovel did better than his hopes. Old eyes brightened at the sight of her, young cheeks flushed when she spoke to them. It was plain that the gentlemen thought the rumours of her beauty had not told half the truth and they would be eager to tell a better tale of her. The lady was kind too, gracious to age, merry with youth, and yet none of them was permitted to forget that she was a great lady.

In the background Sir Charles Monox, watching with grave satisfaction, came upon Mr. Lethenard. "Why, Geoffrey! I thought you had gone home." He dropped his voice. "Is anything gone amiss?"

Mr. Lethenard laughed. "Lord, Charles, I would not have your anxious mind for a fortune. When you are in heaven, you will still be wondering if you can be saved."

"Or if others can be."

"Oh, Pharisee. Well, be at peace. All's right. What should be wrong? There is nothing to do yet. I went home to look at the hay and count the lambs and sell Crummie's calf." He shrugged. "What would you have? That's my life. Well, I have been home and set the grey hen and come back to be a fine gentleman again."

"And see the fair Miss Lovel?"

Mr. Lethenard smiled. "If she be not fair for me, what care I how fair she be? Faith, it's a generous damsel. She smiles upon all, gentle and simple."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Why, that's her charm."

"Charles, Charles, I shall have to warn Lady Monox to be jealous."

Sir Charles was not pleased. It appeared to him that Geoffrey Lethenard lacked respect for his dignity. He had suspected this before. But he liked to think well of every one. Perhaps it was only that Geoffrey's taste was poor. The good fellow lived much among the common folk.

Miss Lovel swept up to them. "I have made so many new friends that Mr. Lethenard is an old one already. And so he'll not trouble to speak to me." She gave him her hand and a straight, frank look.

"Nay, ma'am, it's for queens to speak first. A subject don't speak till he is spoken to."

"Like a ghost," she cried. "Faith, you have something ghostly about you. You are aloof and you hover and watch."

"No one but you has ever seen me so," Lethenard said, intent upon her.

"Why, no one sees a ghost ever but the one for whom he comes," she laughed. "Do you bring me my doom, Mr. Lethenard?"

"I promise you I am flesh and blood, Miss Lovel."

"La, it's a condescension," says she, and swept away.

Dr. King led her into dinner. Dr. King, complacently conscious of a glittering and crowded table, must needs tell her, "I am the head of a poor house, madam. We study the muses on a little oatmeal."

"Sir, you are like a girl who tells her lover that she is plain," said Miss Lovel. "But I am not in love with you. Fie, I will not praise your table. It is not for me. No man takes pains for a woman's dinner. He does not think her worthy good eating. This is all for the men."

The doctor, who was always to find her difficult, said something foolish. On his other side Mr. Fettiplace chuckled. "Nay, child, you are the prodigal come home again, and he has killed the fatted calf."

"A prodigal daughter? Oh, sir, no man makes a feast to have her home again. That's not moral."

"We are both prodigals, my dear, who have basked in the

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

sun and forgot our duty. But they have a place for us yet."

"In our hearts, sir, in our hearts," Dr. King cried. "It is a welcome to you both, madam. You do not know us yet, but we will earn your love."

Miss Lovel lifted her glass. "I give you leave, doctor." She looked at him over the white wine.

"Drink to me only with thine eyes," Dr. King cried, "and I will pledge with mine, or leave a kiss within the cup——"

"Faith, madam," says another reverend doctor, "if such gifts are going I would not be left out."

So she had to kiss her glass again and again and the dinner went merrily. She found the company eager for a word or a look of hers. "I vow it turns my head to be the only woman for so many men," said she.

"Nay, madam, in any company you will be the only woman," an old squire laughed.

"God save me, a hard life, sir. All the world and his wife would hate me."

Dr. King, labouring hard, turned the talk about him to the hopes of the Jacobites: how they held Oxford at their will; how strong they were in the country. But Miss Lovel would have none of it. She chose to amuse herself and the men asked nothing better than to amuse her. Dr. King grasped at a moment and cried out, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, a bumper for the King."

The wine went round. The old squire nodded, smiling at Miss Lovel:

> "God bless the King! God bless the faith's defender!
> God bless—no harm in blessing—the Pretender,
> But which Pretender is, and which is King,
> God bless us all, is quite another thing."

Miss Lovel filled her glass. All round the table men shifted the finger bowls and rose. "The King!" they cried, and across the water the glasses passed before they drank. Miss Lovel looked at her grandfather. As he did, so did she. Her glass moved over the water and she held it a moment to her lips. "The King, God save him," she said gravely.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Gentlemen, the Prince of Wales," the doctor cried at her elbow. Again Miss Lovel's glass came to her lips.

A young fellow cried out a snatch of a ballad to Charlie, to Charlie the young Chevalier, and there was cheering.

Miss Lovel sat down again and turned to Dr. King. "Sir, you have given me noble entertainment. Pray thank all your friends for me."

"Why, madam, you'll not leave us yet." Dr. King was startled. "You leave us desolate."

"No, sir, to your ease."

She rose and swept to the door and made a stately curtsey to the company and was gone.

The gentlemen sat late over their wine and were noisy. It seemed to Mr. Fettiplace, who drank water, that England had changed little since the death of good Queen Anne. Mr. Harley never held more port, Harry St. John had no greater thirst for Burgundy than the new generation. The talk sounded much the same as when St. John was for sending Matt Prior on an embassy to King James, and Dr. Atterbury was swearing they had but to take heart and declare for the Stuarts and all England would be of their side. Here was a man full of ingenious plots for other men to act, there a careful fellow finding objections to everything, but vowing the business would be done easily if only they went the right way about it; there a melancholy seer protesting that nothing would be well till they dished the Whigs and brought in the rightful King, yet opining that it could never be done; here again half a dozen fire-eaters were roaring of boot and saddle and a dash for it, and here a grave man talking so obscurely that his words were taken for the sagest policy. And all went to a din of boisterous jokes and catches. Mr. Fettiplace felt the years slip from him. . . . He was back again in his youth. He set his mind to the old thoughts, the old hopes. . . . But he was not interested. He sipped his water and wondered if the noise was tiring Susan.

It was not. Susan Lovel, looking out of window, saw the houses on the other side of Oriel Street close upon her and felt imprisoned. Oriel men lounging about the lodge were startled by a fine lady walking alone into the meadows.

"The transit of Venus, Phil," one nudged his fellow.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Miss Lovel was sublimely unaware of them or their eyes. What she wanted was wide spaces and free air. She found them. A shower had left the meadows glistening, and her silk shoes were soon wet, but she wandered in the grass plucking here and there a fritillary till she had a bunch shaking the rain from their heavy heads into her bosom. She swept on in long easy strides, looking far through the lucid air across the river to the hills, and breathed deep. The sky was silvery, broken with gleams of blue, but away on the hills the clouds gathered dark for another storm.

She did not turn. But for the thrushes and blackbirds singing their joys in the great elms she was alone. She wanted that. Not that the dark purposes of Dr. King troubled her. He and his eager company dwindled out of her thoughts when she left them. It was the way of her mind to find diversion in men and women but to live apart. She was interested in being Susan Lovel.

This young woman desired to taste everything that could be found in the world, but she had no notion of giving herself up to anything or allowing anything to change her or to become worth anxiety. She had never in her life wanted what she could not have or what cost her pain to come by. She had never wished any change in herself. What changes came she accepted with a happy curiosity as she watched herself become a woman. She was without vanity. She had no conceit of her body or her wits. She thought many women better provided. But she judged Susan Lovel happier than any of them and was content.

So she walked in the meadows taking her delight of the world and her own strength, till the storm came sweeping down from the Berkshire hills. She ran through it laughing and took shelter under the wall by St. Aldate's.

After a while, since the rain would not stop, she set off up the street, smiling at her draggled plight. Under the archway of a humble inn she saw Mr. Lethenard in talk with some country fellows. He saw her and was horrified. She waved her hand to him. "I praise your weather, sir."

"Good God, ma'am." He sprang to her side. "This is dangerous for you. Come in while I find you a coach."

"In there?" She looked at the grimy inn. "No, thank

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

you. It's no such matter, sir. A coach will not serve. The rain runs down my skin already. I'll walk on."

Mr. Lethenard walked with her. Mr. Lethenard looked at her anxiously.

"Why, what's the matter?" She laughed.

"Confess, madam, you are surprising. I thought you drinking tea in Dr. King's lodging, and you tramp the town in the rain alone."

"La, sir, I thought you drinking wine with Dr. King's gentlemen and you lounge with poor folk at a poor tavern. But I am not curious; not I."

Mr. Lethenard laughed. "A poor squire must lie at a poor inn."

"I am angry with you, sir." She flushed. "You have put me in the wrong. Well, I went out because I love to be alone under the sky. But the sky has fallen on me."

"Pray, ma'am, don't walk alone in Oxford again."

"Why not, sir?"

"Look in the glass, ma'am."

"I thank you for your fatherly care of me. I would not displease you for the world. I shall not be tempted. We leave Oxford to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Mr. Lethenard was startled. "Pray give me leave to ride with you."

"Oh heaven, what a country is this! Even out of Oxford I am not safe without Mr. Lethenard."

"Safe enough, madam. I beg a favour."

She looked at him and smiled. "You are urgent, my friend. If you choose to go my way, you may go with me."

"I shall hold you to your word," Lethenard said, and since they were come to St. Mary's Hall made his bow and vanished into the rain.

"This fellow is mighty romantic." Susan Lovel smiled to herself. "And a pretty fellow too." She shed her wet clothes and stood before the glass. "His skin must be as fair as mine." The clatter of a drinking song penetrated to her room. "Oh, they are still at it! Mr. Lethenard left them to their wine, like a lady. He is no reveller, he."

After a while Mr. Fettiplace came tapping at her door and found her in bed reading a novel by M. de Crébillon.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"My dear, have they given you a headache?" he said anxiously.

"I defy them. But you, sir? You look melancholy."

"In fact, I remember that it is a long time since I was young," said Mr. Fettiplace.

"Fie, you will never be old, you are too kind. And you are not allowed to be old; you have to keep me company."

Mr. Fettiplace caressed her. "Well, madam, Dr. King has sent a thousand pretty speeches to persuade you stay with him awhile."

"Sir, he is very obliging. I make him my best curtsey."

"I am sure he deserves it. A dear fellow," said Mr. Fettiplace affectionately.

"You are the master, sir. But I think we should be very pleased to see him at Ashcombe, should not we?"

"Indeed we should," Mr. Fettiplace agreed.

"Pray ask him then. We might be there to-morrow."

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Fettiplace. "Good night, then. We should be moving early."

So in the morning they left Dr. King voluble with promises that they would see him soon in Cotswold, and when they came to the gate of St. Mary Hall, the doctor still clinging to Mr. Fettiplace, there stood Mr. Lethenard waiting. Sir Charles Monox yawned his wonder.

"What, Geoffrey! Shall we have your company? This is an honour, indeed, madam. It's a gentleman that loves to go his way alone."

"The lion walks alone," says Miss Lovel in a voice of reverent awe. "But this is a gallant lion. He thinks a maiden cannot be safe in his wild country unless he has her under his eye. I vow he thinks he is in a romance where a virgin must always have a lion at call. And faith, lions never devour virgins, do they, Mr. Lethenard?"

Sir Charles Monox allowed himself to laugh. "Do they, Geoffrey?" he said.

"They are too shy," said Mr. Lethenard. "And that is why they make no friends."

"A lonely creature." Susan Lovel looked at him. "But I suppose pride is good company." And she got into her coach.

So with a gentleman riding on either side she drove away

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

over the flat lands under Witham Hill. Mr. Lethenard, if proud, was not presumptuous. He left the place of honour at her window to Sir Charles Monox and himself rode by Mr. Fettiplace and listened gravely to the old gentleman's chatter of gay Oxford days fifty years before: how well Mr. Fettiplace knew all the Oxford countryside, having been (in those days) a naughty fellow, who loved not books but sport, how he would make a party to catch crayfish in the Glyme, and what merry sport that was; how they would ride out on this very road to dine on Windrush eels and a pottle of Wytham strawberries and not get into college till Tom was ringing curfew, the rogues. Mr. Lethenard, whether he listened or not, was attentive to the old gentleman, though his stories endured till they were coming into Burford. Then Susan Lovel must needs call on him to rejoice with her in the gracious little town, yet not so much in the pleasant form and craftsmanship of the mellow stone houses as at the vista down the wide street of the hills beyond, long green slopes glowing in the sun, broken with dark hollows of woodland.

"My own hills, are not they?" she cried: and Mr. Fettiplace nodded and rubbed his hands and laughed happily.

"Shipton downs, madam," said Sir Charles Monox. "A wild place."

They stopped to dine at King Charles's inn, and sat long, Mr. Fettiplace remembering many things. At last Susan became aware of a certain absence of mind in Sir Charles Monox and offered any gentleman who had drunk enough wine the honour of showing her the town.

"Your servant, madam." Sir Charles rose. "We have time while they put the horses to. I believe we should not wait here longer, eh Geoffrey?"

"Why, what's the matter?" Susan cried.

"Sir Charles is in haste to be with Lady Monox," Lethenard smiled.

"Lady Monox is much obliged to you, Mr. Lethenard," said Sir Charles stiffly. "We have far to go yet, Miss Lovel, and we should be over Shipton downs betimes. They have no good name."

"Oh, is that your mystery." She looked from Monox to

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Lethenard. "Faith, I thought I was well guarded." And Mr. Fettiplace ordered the coach.

"Nothing will happen, ma'am." Lethenard smiled. "Nothing ever happens."

"But you would like to be there if it does?"

"Perhaps." Lethenard rose with a shrug.

She looked at him. He was certainly a powerful creature. Miss Lovel had not met many men who gave her that sensation. She was not used to meet men who were bigger than she. Mr. Lethenard could look down at her —and did. That was interesting; but not as interesting as the placid vigour of the man. A queer fellow. He made no parade. He did not want anyone to know how strong he was.

They drove out of Burford and began to climb the long hill beyond the river. The road was open on either hand, they could see far in front. "Fie, is this where your wild men lurk, Sir Charles?" Susan laughed. "A cat would find no cover here."

But after a while copses began to creep up the hillside till they had a belt of woodland closing on them. Monox spurred on calling to his grooms and arranged a vanguard and rearguard. "Careful soul," Lethenard laughed, but himself rode on and took post in front of all.

Nothing did happen. They came on open down again, having seen no creatures more dangerous than sheep and a staring shepherd, and turned off the high road by a lane that led down into the Windrush valley again.

"It is always like that, eh, Monox?" Lethenard said as they came up to him. "We make ready for great deeds— and go home to bed."

"The gentleman is disappointed. He hoped to be in action." Susan looked at him curiously.

"Not I, ma'am. It is Monox who sees adventures."

"There have been adventures enough on this road, as Mr. Lethenard well knows." Sir Charles had a suspicion that he was thought ridiculous. He was not pleased. "I suppose you have not forgotten poor Yearp, or the affair at Tangley Hall?" Lethenard shrugged. Sir Charles felt it due to his dignity to tell Miss Lovel the story. Yearp was a rich farmer of Iccombe who left Burford on market

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

day with his pockets full of money. His horse came home to Iccombe with clots of blood in its mane, but no rider. Some days after the naked body of Yearp was washed against Burford Bridge. Its face had been battered in. As for Tangley Hall—one night a band of rascals came hammering at the door. They broke a panel, one of them thrust his arm through to undo the bolts. But there were some sturdy young fellows waiting inside, and they laid hold of that arm and the rascal could not free himself. So then "Cut, cut," he cried, and his fellows hacked his arm through and made off with him leaving the arm behind.

"Your stories are horrid, sir," said Miss Lovel. "Who are these desperate fellows? What are you gentlemen about that you do not hunt them down?"

"Why, madam, the rogues go to ground over there in Wychwood. It's a blind country. They are a pack of masterless men, gipsy folk and deer stealers such as a forest breeds. And there is no strong hand to deal with them nowadays."

"Oh," said Miss Lovel. "I suppose nothing will be well till the King enjoys his own again."

"You will find much needs mending, madam." Sir Charles smiled. "But have no fear of them. They do not come into Gloucestershire. I hope we should know how to take order with them even now. Eh, Lethenard?"

"I think Miss Lovel is not alarmed," Lethenard smiled.

They were coming into a comfortable village, through which a stream sparkled under many tiny bridges and children and ducks splashed out of clumps of St. John's wort into the clear amber water and made a joyful noise. "Miss Lovel don't believe in your horrors, sir," she said. This country is kind—kind."

"It's Bourton, dear," Mr. Fettiplace chuckled. "Bourton on the Water. We are near home."

Before them hills rose again, but cleft in many little valleys, and as the coach laboured on woods towered above them dark, for the sun was low and they lay in shadow save on the crest of the hill where the tall beeches glowed green and gold.

"There, child, there," Mr. Fettiplace cried. "Ashcombe is under the hill."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"In that wood, sir?" She looked grave.

"Wait," the old man chuckled.

They came by a long wall in which patches of new stone were orange among the weather-worn grey. A little company of country folk stood waiting where a lodge guarded great gates, the men raised a jolly cheer, the women bobbed curtseys and the coach turned on to a mossy road which swept through an avenue of limes across burnished turf. Away and away from the towering woods it turned and climbed till it brought them to level open ground, and there unshadowed yet sheltered rose Ashcombe Grange.

Many hands had worked upon the house in many years, but all the changes made to the taste of King James and King Charles had not spoilt the form which the Tudor builders gave. Though the sun was low it was bathed in sunlight. The windows to the west blazed gold, the southern front rising in many gables from the pillared porch was golden brown in the mellow light, the stone slabs of the roof were golden with old lichens. From the porch in terraces of turf and flowers the ground fell to a stream, which glowed gold with mimulus and kingcups and iris.

Sir Charles dismounted and stood hat in hand at the coach door. "Pray, madam, let me bid you welcome home," he said majestically.

"Home!" she laughed. "Oh, I am fortunate."

"God give you joy of it, madam." He took her hand in his to help her from the coach.

Then she turned to Mr. Fettiplace. "You must lead me in, sir."

The old gentleman's eyes were dark and he leaned a little on her arm.

Lethenard and Monox lingered by the coach, but as she went in she turned and called to them. "Come, gentlemen, come."

Sir Charles made her a bow. "Pray give me leave, madam. I have a wife."

"And I madam," Lethenard smiled. "I have a farm."

"You must not turn away from my door when first it opens for me."

Lethenard strode in.

"You are my first guest, sir." She made him a curtsey.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

He took her hand. "Your first subject, madam," he said, and kissed it and was gone.

She stood a moment and watched him ride away.

Monox waited. "You have your own thoughts, madam," he said gently. "Give me leave to go."

"Now are you come to your kingdom," said Mr. Fettiplace.

She bent and kissed him.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER V

MANY INVENTIONS

PETER BOTYNOR lay among lilies of the valley and ate mutton ham. It seemed to him that the world was good.

The spring had come late. Oak and ash swayed bright with the flush of young leaves, pale green and yellow and crimson. The white lily bells were not all open yet, though the fragrance of them was about him. Beyond the wood, the lambs were still pent in a fold of hurdles woven with straw to hold off the wind and furnished with a thatched roof in the corners for shelter against the spring sleet and rain. But they were playing and noisy in the sunshine without a shepherd.

The wind brought him clean, sharp scents of growing turf. White fleeces of cloud hurried across the bright sky. He could see far across the valley, far over the bare breasts and shoulders of the hills beyond, amber where the young barley had not yet coloured the tilth, golden green where the turf clothed them, with golden flowers of silver weed and primroses and cowslips and celandine gilding the grass.

Peter Botynor remembered that he had seen half a dozen countries and wondered why. But he was an honest creature, and he remarked to himself that he would still be filling his eyes and his throat with the dust of Provence if he had not a sister. "Oh admirable Dorcas," said he. "This is a good place to come home to." But he did not make haste home. In fact, he had not hurried since he departed from Mr. Twiss. He had too many friends on the way. His much-enduring head was still a little heavy from the rum punch of Turkdean. He lay on his back among the lilies and slept.

When he awoke, it was past noon. He had some diffi-

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

culty in remembering where he was and what he was doing. "To be sure, I am going home. I do not know why I am going home, but Dorcas does. Yes. I am now going to dine with Dorcas. Then I shall find out. She never has any difficulty in saying what she wants, the admirable Dorcas. I wonder why she did not say in her letter. Is it possible that she thought I should not come if I knew what she wanted me for? It is not possible. I have never disobeyed the good Dorcas. I shouldn't dare. It would be far too much trouble. Lord, I shall be late for dinner and Dorcas won't like that at all. She is most alarming when she is grieved."

He buckled his saddle-bags on his horse again and rode off by an ancient bridle track. It took him over the high ground to the north of Ashcombe Grange and he had glimpses of the park and the great house. "Why, what now?" He turned in his saddle to look. From many of the chimneys came blue films of smoke. "Ashcombe has been shut up as long as I remember. Old Simon Fettiplace has never come back. He must be a hundred. Perhaps the admirable Dorcas has summoned him from the grave. Lord, I hope he wasn't late for dinner."

It is certain that Mr. Botynor was. When he arrived at his sister's house, somebody was singing a song about a dimpled smiling Chloe:

> Although I have left her, the truth I'll declare:
> I believe she was good, I am sure she was fair,
> But goodness and charms in a bumper I see
> That make it as good and as charming as she.

Whereby Mr. Botynor learnt two things: that my lady had company to dinner and that my lady had left the gentlemen to their wine. For Sir Charles Monox never sang a song in his life and Lady Monox never sat still under songs like that. Mr. Botynor knocked and knocked again.

At last a breathless footman gaped at him and let him in. My lady was in the drawing-room alone. "Your ladyship's most obedient," said Mr. Botynor.

"Peter! My dear boy," she came to him and engulfed him. Mr. Botynor kissed her with good will. She was much like him, dark and rosy, but of a more opulent

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

form. "You have been a thousand years away, sir. I promise you I shall keep you now." She held him off and looked at him. "You have grown a pretty fellow, have not you?"

Mr. Botynor laughed. "You always did think you were my mother. Well, ma'am, how is Charles and how is my godson? But I need not ask. My lady would not be so blooming, if they were not."

"Little Charles is grown a great fellow. It seems certain he will be like his father, my dear. And Sir Charles is absurdly proud of him."

"Then what does your ladyship want with me?"

"Silly fellow," said her ladyship, stroking him. "Peter, have you had any dinner?"

Mr. Botynor groaned. "No, Dorcas. I have sinned. I am late again. I was born to trouble the house of Monox. You shouldn't have brought me back."

"You are a rogue. I believe you loitered to tease me. Away with you. The men are still at table. I will have something sent you." Her ladyship bustled.

Mr. Botynor found a large company at wine. He knew them all, Cotswold squires and squire's sons, they were a muster of every good Tory for ten miles round. Peter Botynor, who had always been every one's friend, was made jovially welcome. The wine went round. Some one began to sing:

> Fair Hebe I left with a cautious design
> To escape from her charms and to drown them in wine
> I tried it: but found when I came to depart
> The wine in my head and still love in my heart.

Peter made play with a sirloin and was still at it when old Squire Izod of Bourton was set up to sing his hunting song. By the time that was over, and there was no end to the choruses, Peter was ready to do his duty by the port.

The decanter interested him. It was cut with curious devices: a spray of roses, a compass pointing to a star, and the word FIAT: and these things were not borne on the coat of arms of the family of Monox.

Lethenard at his elbow saw him studying the design and smiled. "A pretty fancy, Peter."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Very neat and good. But I don't know what it means."

"My dear boy, I thought you were a scholar. FIAT—a Latin word, child—let it be done."

"And a very good word for a decanter too. But what's the roses and the compass?"

"The rose for England. And England true as the compass to the star. So let the great deed be done. A pretty fancy. Monox has just had the glass cut at Derby. Faith, you have come back at the right time, Peter." He lifted his glass.

"What are you drinking there, Geoffrey?" Sir Charles cried from the head of the table.

Lethenard started up, "Fiat!" he cried.

"With all my heart," Sir Charles said, and the company got on their legs and drank it with shouts.

"Yes, you have gone some way since I was in England," said Peter.

"At least we have gone too far to stand still," Lethenard smiled.

"Or to go back?"

"Do you think these are men to go back, Peter?" Lethenard looked round the table. "Devilish slow to start some of us, but when we are off, we go through or over."

"What started 'em, Lethenard?"

"Why, we are all tired of being plundered by these Whig placemen in London and their German King, eh Izod?"

Old Squire Izod confirmed it with oaths. "He had had enough of spending his money on Hanover: enough of being governed by dirty Whigs. "Ecod, Peter, we want a king that's a gentleman and treats gentlemen like gentlemen." He had some difficulty with those hard words but his fervour was immense. "Damme, my boy, they ha' played with us too long. It's gentlemen with a stake in the country that should rule the roast, the country gentlemen, that's the backbone of old England. Men that farms their own land. We'll never have our rights till we have our rightful King. Here's to him: the King over the water! And jolly Prince Charlie! Strike up, Ned Mustoe. You know that song."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

So Mr. Mustoe was put up and they roared his chorus for him :

'Twas on a Monday morning
Right early in the year
That Charlie came to our town
The young Chevalier !

And Charlie he's my darling !
My darling ! my darling !
And Charlie he's my darling
The young Chevalier.

" And when is the great deed to be done, Lethenard," said Peter. " On Monday morning ? "

" He that believeth shall not make haste." Lethenard smiled.

" Faith, I have not found it so."

" Here is ardour ! Why, we had to wait for Mr. Botynor. You would not have us begin without you."

" You have kept a place for me ? Now that's very polite, What is it ? "

" How can I tell ? I am not in command. I think we have no order of battle yet. Faith, we shall all claim the right of the line, like the Highlanders. But they tell me this is to be a grand affair. No turning back from Derby for us. It's all or nothing. Is that your humour, Peter ? "

" I like to know the game before I wager. You play high, Lethenard."

" Who, I ? Lord, I have nothing to lose. My father saw to that. It is easy for me." He shrugged. " Well, a man likes to stand by his name. We gave everything else to the King."

Peter knew that it was true enough. He looked at the lazy, scornful face. " Yes, faith, the Lethenards have done their share," he said with respect.

" It's these rich fellows I admire, Peter," Lethenard lowered his voice. " Izod there, Edward Mustoe, Garstang, they are keen as old hounds. Who'd have thought it of them ? Egad, sir, we shall see great days."

" I wonder when," said Peter.

Lethenard laughed. " Do you hear, squire ? " he called to old Izod. " Mr. Botynor wants to know when hounds meet."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"You'll hear of it, Peter boy," Mr. Izod nodded and winked. "We'll let you know the day. And you'll be up in the morning." He roared out a chorus:

Up in the morning early
Before the break of day
Up in the morning early.

And ended with a view halloa. They drank fox hunting and were boisterous. . . .

Peter Botynor having assisted to bedrooms the last of those who were too drunk for riding, came down to his brother-in-law, who with his wig off sat writing. "Lord, here is a man with a clear head. What is all this, Charles? What have you been doing?"

"My dear fellow, I should not have chosen to give you the news so. But we could not write it safely. Well, you have heard and seen. We shall strike for the King this summer. We have all Cotswold with us, all the west. I hear great things from the north. I believe the whole country will be up. If the King will give us a leader, we shall do the deed for him at last."

"Did I say you had a clear head, Charles? I have not. Here is work for a fellow to find when he comes home!"

"My dear lad, you would not choose to be out of it?"

"No, Charles. No. I should not choose to be out of it," said Mr. Botynor slowly. "But I am a little dizzy. I think I will go to bed." And Sir Charles with a paternal smile turned back to his letter to Dr. King.

In a dreamy manner Peter went through the motions of undressing himself. He had lived and moved from his cradle among Jacobite hopes and plans. A placid and critical mind was not by such experience persuaded to faith that anything drastic would come of them. Even when Prince Charles brought his Highlanders to Derby in '45, though Cotswold rumbled and muttered, it did not stir. But Peter had never heard so many voices for action. The good fellows must have been much worked upon. The plan, to be sure, was not quite as clear as the majestic Charles seemed to think. Into Peter's head came the words of the old Jacobite prayer, "Do some great thing for him, which we in particular know not how to pray for."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

They did not know what they were praying for, good fellows. But they had it in their heads that they were going to do something tremendous and an accident or a trick might set them off.

One thing only was clear to Peter—why the admirable Dorcas wanted him home. He got into bed and was sorry for Dorcas. Charles was in it up to the neck and she would certainly require every one to go in with Charles. A wearing business—to be a wife : and harassing also to the innocent. Women with brothers ought not to marry.

At this point in his meditations his sister came into the bedroom. She did not appear worn or harassed. She was an agreeable sight, in a loose low gown that was bound by a ribbon below her breasts, with curls breaking out of a lace cap about her round, rosy face. The light of her candle played prettily about her neck and bosom.

"My poor boy," she sat down on the bed, "are you tired out? What animals men are! I thought those fellows would never have done drinking."

"No. There is an end to all things. Even Ned Mustoe can be filled full. A saddening sight. But what would you have? If one sits down to table with fools one must sit there till they go under it."

"Yes, dear. Charles always says that," she arranged the bed-clothes. "I am so sorry the creatures were here when you came. I wanted you to myself."

"Faith, your ladyship has me now," Peter shifted in the bed to make more room for her and put his arm round her waist. "But I suppose you would have broken it to me gently. It's no matter, madam. They were all zeal and fire. And I—I am throbbing yet."

Her ladyship's fine eyes grew larger. "Oh yes," she said in a moment. "Charles says it will be a great affair. He is very busy with it. I am sure he counts on you, Peter." Her tone was that of a woman maternally sympathizing with the affairs of her men.

Peter stirred. Peter drew her against him. "Dorcas, my dear," he said, "is it possible I have done you wrong? Wasn't it this business that you brought me home for?"

"Of course I should like you to be with Charles if any-

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

thing happens. But you were so long away and I wanted you home."

"My dear girl," Peter kissed her.

"Tell me what you have been doing, sir. I began to think we should never see you again."

"Faith, it's late to begin traveller's tales. What shall I tell you? That there's no good mutton in Italy and no good beef in France and no cook in England knows how to fry? Well, I have seen cities and men, and there is no city, no, not Florence, that's worth a Cotswold valley."

Lady Monox settled herself more comfortably and smiled at him. "I am content, sir. I thought you were like to set up house in Italy and give me an Italian sister."

"Lord, no, madam. What should I do with a wife? I should always be thinking I had a prettier woman, my sister."

Lady Monox laughed and said he was a rogue to make game of her. But she looked down at him with satisfaction. "I am as like you as any woman can be like a man," says she. "Judge if that makes me a beauty!" She pulled his ear.

Peter sat up in bed and, holding on by her, contemplated the two people whom the candle light displayed in the glass, an odd pair, for he, without his wig, showed a naked poll and her black curls would not be confined. But the two faces were both round, of neat, small features, and a certain placidity. "Yes, my child," said Mr. Botynor, "if I grew some ringlets of my own I should do very well for a woman. Shall we change about? Quit you like a man, Dorcas, be strong. I never was."

"You were always a goose," said Lady Monox. "You are very much a man, Peter. Fie. I suppose many a woman has told you so."

"Not so neatly, no. In fact, the creatures don't seem to notice it."

"You are too placid, sir. You are so pleased with yourself. But I suppose you don't mean to live alone all your days."

"Dorcas! What have you been at? Let me know the

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

worst. Have you found me a wife? Is there a damsel waiting for me downstairs?"

"Will you be serious?" Lady Monox cried. "Indeed, sir, this is no way to talk. You well know I do not think of these things so."

"You are the best of sisters and women. But still a woman and a sister, and a married sister withal. Sometimes that alarms me, Dorcas."

Lady Monox showed some signs of tears. "My dear, I only want you to do your duty and be happy."

"I knew it," said Peter and subsided. "Who is she?"

"You take me unkindly," said Lady Monox, "indeed you do, Peter. There is only you and I left now. You should be living at Priors and——"

"And having children to my desire. Yes. I see my duty clear. But who is to be their mother? I should like to know."

"My dear, that is for you," said her ladyship generously. "You are a bad fellow to mock me. You know you have always gone your own way. But it would be such a joy to see you open your house at Priors. And what I wanted you to know, there is a most lovely creature come to Cotswold. I never saw so fine a woman, my dear. But indeed she is as gentle as she is beautiful."

"But think of me, ma'am," Peter protested. "'As Paris handsome and as Hector brave.' Do I not deserve her. Ay, and twenty such."

"You are an impudent fellow," but her ladyship smiled fondly. "Well, I think any woman should be glad of you, child. You are so kind."

"Lord, it is the woman's business to be kind, not mine," said Peter. "But what is your paragon like? Big or little? Fair or black?"

"She is a stately thing, sir, and the fairest woman I ever saw, white and gold like a lily."

"A pretty match for my dark beauty," Peter grinned. "And who is this daughter of the gods? What is her name on earth?"

"Susan Lovel," said her ladyship and hesitated. "You

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

cannot know her unless—did you see her in Italy, Peter ? "

For Peter was looking at her with a queer, sarcastic smile. " Susan Lovel ? " he repeated. " That is old Simon Fettiplace's granddaughter. The girl owns half three counties. So she is my duty, is she ? You are a provident sister, Dorcas. You forget nothing. Pray have you told the girl the honour that awaits her ? "

" Peter, you are not angry with me ? "

Peter laughed. " You are an angel. A most human angel, Dorcas. I hope you told her that I always do my duty. It would give the poor girl confidence."

" I told her that I had a brother who was a sad vagabond," said Lady Monox and kissed him. " Good night, sir."

" The devil you did ! " said Peter. It was borne in upon him that the admirable Dorcas had more worldly wisdom than he had supposed. But he did not think that she knew her brother very well. The orders given him did not long keep him from sleep.

When he woke, which it was his nature to do suddenly and completely, he discovered that he was thinking of her ladyship and suffering from surprise, but his mind was not clear and why he was surprised he had to argue. Nothing could be more natural than her ladyship : that a married, maternal sister should want to marry her brother off and find him an heiress for a wife was what all the world would expect of her. And the admirable Dorcas had always shown the maternal instinct for arranging people's lives in great vigour. Yet there was something in the affair which seemed to Mr. Botynor not quite like Dorcas. She was in such a hurry : not a characteristic of the placid Botynor blood. She was so loud in the lady's praise. And the good Dorcas was not given to enthusiasm. Well, suppose Miss Lovel's charm alluring as her wealth, and all that was natural enough too. Yet Mr. Botynor felt that the way Dorcas handled the affair was odd : a little crude, a little violent for Dorcas.

He was well aware that these arguments would not help him. The important, the overwhelming fact was that the admirable Dorcas intended him to marry the girl. Whether her methods were violent or of the calm ingen-

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

uity with which she used to manage him, she would be ruthless.

Peter Botynor put his legs out of bed and contemplated them and the future with a pensive smile. He was sorry for Miss Lovel. It seemed likely that she and he would have tiresome hours to spend. He hoped the girl had some humour. But in his experience that was not common in women with great possessions. They were taught to set too high a value on themselves.

He was not curious about her. His sister's proclamation of her beauty left him coldly sceptical. He had never found that a woman's judgment of another woman's looks was sound. Whatever the girl was, he did not want her. Peter Botynor had not begun to feel the need of a wife. He had enjoyed his diversions placidly and was ready for any girl who amused him. But he saw no convenience in marrying. And the husband of a rich woman was a part that did not attract him. He liked money as much as other people, but he had enough for his ease and was not concerned to get more. He had no use for Miss Lovel.

These meditations he did not confide to her ladyship. There was no need of much diplomacy. The good fellows who had drunk themselves a lodging for the night were at the breakfast table drinking much small beer. Her ladyship could not bring him back to Miss Lovel there, and he was quick to engage with one of them to ride on home. Lady Monox cried out that he was no sooner come than he was gone again, but he got off with a protest that he must see the old house and a promise that they would have him back before they wanted him.

The manor house of Priors Humble, ancestral home of the Botynors, who were thereabouts when a Mercian King reigned over Cotswold, was a little, cosy place nestling in the dimple of a long green slope close on a hurrying stream of amber water. Only above the porch a gable broke the line of its low roof and peach and pear trained about the little lattice windows were covering the brown walls with pink and white blossom. Out of that porch beneath the crumbled carving of his coat of arms, Peter came with a rod and crossed between the primroses and violets of the little

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

garden and through the arch of the yew hedge to the stream. It was a windy evening of sunshine and scurrying showers. He wandered up stream, casting a fly in one pool and another, but with small fortune till as he came near the road on the hill he saw a pretty girl loitering.

She wore a russet cloak and hood, from which looked out an eager, dark face. She was small but buxom, a pleasant round creature. She made round eyes at him. "La, Mr. Botynor," says she laughing and blushing. "How you startled me." She made a show of putting her hand to her breast. "I didn't know you had come home, sir."

"Why, it's Jessie. Jessie grown a woman! Who would have thought it?"

"Pray what did you think I should grow?" says she.

"I didn't think you would grow up, ma'am."

"Are you sorry, sir? Well, so am I." The round face looked wistful. "I couldn't help it."

"Faith, it's a pity. You were a dear child. But this is very good company too. My humble compliments, Miss Marner." He made her a bow and kissed her hand, which she endured with a pretty awkwardness. "You have done mighty well with yourself."

"Have I, sir?" she said gravely. "Well, I would have you think so."

"I vow I have not seen so pretty a creature since I saw Jessie last."

"Is that what you say to all women, Mr. Botynor?"

"No, it's what all men say to you, Miss Marner."

"I never see any men," said she. "What's a man like, Mr. Botynor?"

"If I were to tell you, Jessie, you'd die a maid."

She looked at him. "Perhaps not, sir. Perhaps I shouldn't believe you."

"Well, that is a way to safety," Peter agreed. "Believe what we do, but not what we say."

"La, Mr. Botynor! Are you so dangerous?"

"Faith, it's a matter of taste. Am I dangerous, Jessie?"

"No more than a baby," she said and smiled with a side-long glance.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

So he thought it right to kiss her. "You were always a comfortable child," he said with satisfaction and tucked her into his arm.

"Fie, sir, you bade me remember I was grown a woman," she flushed and struggled a little and laughed.

"And how do you like it as far as you have gone with it?"

"And you, sir?" said Jessie looking up at him with eyes that surprised him.

"You should be happy, my dear," he said and let her go. "How is all the world? Lord, I have not seen half the folks I have been thinking of. How is the learned father? And old Dame Hubbard? And Jerry Prince? And little Tabitha? Faith, you must let me walk home with you."

"Oh, if it please your worship," says she and started away from him. Some one was riding on the road above. He came fast and splashing through the stream saw them and waved his hat to them and laughed. "Aha, Peter my buck! Good luck to you!"

"And what's your hurry?" Peter called. "Has war broke out?"

"Wait awhile, child," Lethenard laughed and rode on.

"Mr. Lethenard is always in a hurry," said Jessie.

"Poor creature," Peter shrugged and drew her arm through his and walked off with her to the rectory of Upper Humble where her father was labouring at a commentary upon the logic of Aristotle and maintaining but little interest in human life.

Mr. Lethenard rode to answer a hasty summons from Sir Charles Monox. When he came to Battle Manor he found that Dr. King, suddenly and beyond expectation, had appeared there. They were at supper and the doctor talking theology to my lady. It was a subject to which Mr. Lethenard had not given much attention, but Lady Monox liked it so well that she sat long at table. When at last she was gone, "Well, doctor," Lethenard laughed, "I suppose you didn't come to Cotswold to talk about heaven."

"No, sir, nor bring you to hear about it. A plan of heaven is no use to Geoffrey Lethenard," says the doctor,

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

who prided himself on being all things to all men. "But there is great news, lad." He leaned over the table glowing. "The Prince will take it up. The Prince is coming to Cotswold."

Lethenard stared. "Well, it is news," he said. "Where does it come from?"

"I have it in his own hand."

Sir Charles pulled out a letter from his bosom and looked at it with a reverent, affectionate smile and passed it to Lethenard. "See, Geoffrey, he writes like a Prince." For the letter told Dr. King that Prince Charles had never believed England was lost, but the doctor's plan was the best hope that had shone in five dark years. "Tell my friends in your loyal west country I trust them as they trust me. I will not fail them. I know they will not fail me. This time we will have none to bid us turn back. There is only one word for me now. Forward." So Dr. King was to go to London and wait him at Lady R's house.

"Is it not a gallant heart?" Sir Charles cried.

Lethenard looked up with a gleam in his blue eyes. "Faith, this is do or die," he said. "We shall see sport in Cotswold this summer."

Dr. King gave, for a parson, a lusty view halloa.

"This is the grand affair," said Sir Charles gravely. "Pray God we show ourselves worthy."

"Quit ye like men, be strong," the doctor cried. "I do not doubt you."

"You'll bring him to Cotswold straight?" says Lethenard.

"As fast as horse can go. I shall be on thorns till I have him safe in the west."

"And he comes here?"

Dr. King rubbed his chin and looked at Sir Charles. "I hope he will honour my house," said Sir Charles. "But I have no claim more than others. And we must be politic. The doctor has a plan that he should go to Ashcombe."

"Why Ashcombe?" said Lethenard sharply: and then laughed. "Lord, I am not jealous. I have no quarters for a Prince at my farm. But why Ashcombe?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Well, you talk of jealousies. And that's what we have to fear. Every man, and what's worse, every woman will be thinking their house has the best right to him. But nobody can be jealous of Fettiplace. He's the oldest squire in Cotswold and has the richest house. He was working for King James before the rest of us were born. He has been out of all your county quarrels this forty years. No one can grumble if the Prince goes to Ashcombe and, what's more, every one can go to him there." Dr. King drank wine and grinned. "That's not all neither. Every one will be going to Ashcombe."

"For the beautiful eyes of mademoiselle? I see, Dr. Machiavell. All our young fellows will be running to Miss Lovel and Miss Lovel will present them to the Prince and they will enlist for her sweet sake. A pretty plot, doctor—if the lady will go into it. What do you know about the lady?"

"Why, there it is," says the doctor. "The woman is a woman and she don't go by her head. Varium et mutabile semper. Old Simon is true blue. He will throw everything in. But she's wayward. Faith, if you want a woman to take sides you should get at her heart. And we must have her. If she was to turn against us now she would leave us a hard game to play. Well, we will give her the Prince." The doctor chuckled in an unclerical manner. "He will do her business."

Lethenard stared at him. "And so we do ours," he said, and he laughed.

"You speak grossly, doctor," said Sir Charles.

"Not I, by my cloth. I say when a young woman has a Prince for her guest, and he is a fine piece of flesh and blood, I would trust her to have a kindness for him. And when that Prince is our Young Chevalier, well even our lady of the golden fleece will be his humble servant."

"I do not think of it so," said Sir Charles with dignity. "Miss Lovel will be proud that Prince Charles should honour her house, and that honour is due to her and her family. And I am very sure that his noble spirit will win her loyalty and her utmost service in this last great adventure."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Why, what else did I say?" cried Doctor King.

"He does it with a better grace," said Lethenard. "You do it more natural." He drank off his wine and rose. "Have it so then. Damme, the lady should be very grateful."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER VI

THE UNINVITED GUEST

PETER BOTYNOR was schooling a young mare. She had given him a turbulent progress up the steep hillside. On the top she ran away with him and he kept her going. Miles of turf rolled before him in long waves, dark where the cloud shadows moved, grey with sheep. The mare ceased to enjoy herself but she began to obey him kindly. "Bless you, my girl, you have a sweeter spirit than I have," said Peter and as they came to the Buckle Street, put her on that ancient track and she began to play with him again. "Oh, be easy, I haven't forgotten you. What a woman it is," says he, and so they came, very good friends, upon a man and a horse who were not.

The man, a bulky fellow, sat upon the grass and nursed a leg and cursed his bulky steed, while his servant, who rode a horse laden with baggage, gazed at him.

Peter's mare did not like them and made a heraldic dance round them.

"Halloa, sir, halloa," the man called. "Well met, begad. Can you tell me where in the damned world we are?"

"Sir, you are on Cotswold, three miles and more from Bourton and six from Stow."

"Thank 'e, you're precise": the man felt his leg affectionately and made a grimace. "Three miles and more! It is telling me to go to hell. Pray, sir, have you nothing nearer?"

Peter with some trouble persuaded the mare to stand. "Why, there is no inn this side of Bourton. Are you hurt, sir?"

"I don't sit in the grass to make daisy chains. Good

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

God, did you not hear the toss I took? It sounded to me like the crash of doom. The earth did quake, begad. This drunken hack of mine crossed his legs and went down on his nose and rolled on me while I was trying to save him. Do you know what a poor devil feels like when he has been on the rack? Faith, I can guess I have not a joint in me that is not twisted. But this off leg is the devil. My foot was in the stirrup and I think the brute turned it round and round." He caressed his boot and swore.

It seemed to Peter that he was mighty sorry for himself. Yet the bold, humorous face did not suggest that he would make a fuss about nothing. "Any bones to mend, sir?" Peter said.

"I hope not. I'm not so old that I'm brittle. But there's the devil of a sprain. I doubt I can cross the saddle. And God knows I can't walk. And you say it's better than three miles to an inn. Damme, sir, is there nothing nearer?"

Peter meditated. Though the fellow was so plaintive there was something pleasant about him. "I wish I could bring you to my own house. That's Priors Humble, sir. My name's Botynor. But you're five miles from there and I have no coach to send for you. I don't care to offer a cart."

"You're devilish kind, Mr. Botynor. Lord, what a fool I must look! Maybe I'll have to ask for your cart. But is there no gentleman has a house hereabouts where I could beg a lodging? Oh, I beg your pardon. My name's Zouch, Sir William Zouch, to serve you."

Peter bowed—and smiled. It seemed to him that he was beginning to understand. "Ashcombe Manor is the nearest," he said.

"Ashcombe?" Sir William cried. "Lord, that's Simon Fettiplace! And is Ashcombe close by, sir?"

"A short mile to the park. You know Mr. Fettiplace, sir?"

"Why, well enough to ask him for a bed. Faith, Mr. Botynor, it's devilish lucky for me you came this road. May I trouble you still? Be the good Samaritan and present me to Mr. Fettiplace."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Why, sir, I don't know him. But I can show you the way to Ashcombe."

"Many thanks," Sir William grunted as he rose gingerly. "Don't know him, eh? I thought all Cotswold knew Simon Fettiplace and the lady fair."

"I have never seen them, sir. I have been out of England."

Sir William shot a keen glance at him and grunted again. "A fine old fellow, I promise you," he said. "Now to get on this brute again, that's the great manœuvre." He turned to his stolid servant who in all this talk had shown no sign of intelligence. "Come down, you fool, and give me a back." The servant hoisting his bulk, he was elevated, puffing and groaning, to the saddle and there sat sideways. The performance, the sight of him, disturbed the sensibilities of Peter's mare. They went down the Buckle Street with her dancing fandangoes in front and Sir William's bulk steadied by a hand on crupper and mane protruding a large leg out from the horse's flank.

Both Peter and the mare were glad when that procession was over, for the gentleman suffered from a desire to laugh and the lady's dignity was offended.

"There's the lodge, sir," Peter turned in the saddle. "The house is half a mile across the park. Good luck to your leg!" And he let the mare go.

"Mighty obliged to you, Mr. Botynor," Sir William called after him.

Peter waved his hand and rode on chuckling. He hoped that the fair Susan Lovel would be there to see the gentleman arrive sideways holding out his fat leg. An affecting sight. What woman's heart could resist it? "Faith, he does the thing thoroughly," said Peter. "An artist!" But it seemed to him that Sir William was a man of simple soul.

In that elaborate story of the fall and the sprain he did not believe in the least. He had no doubt that Sir William had come to Cotswold in order to have an accident at the gate of Susan Lovel and become pathetically her guest. He admired the hearty zest of the performance. But he could not think that it was worth while. If the good fellow wanted to come and woo the incomparable damsel, why take

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

pains to arrive as a figure of fun? "A quaint ingenuity, faith. I like this fat knight," said Peter.

About this moment in the day, Susan Lovel was walking in her garden with a court of gentlemen. Mr. Fettiplace had not had so many friends for forty years. Old fellows came to present their sons, young fellows who were old enough to have no fathers, made haste to present themselves. The earliest of them would be at Ashcombe soon after breakfast, the latest would be in time for dinner, and when they had once found their way there, they fulfilled to the utmost Mr. Fettiplace's hospitable hope that he would see them often.

For the lady was of a universal kindness. If none of these gentlemen could boast that she had shown him peculiar favour, every one might swear that she liked him very well, and hope for the best. It's believed that she did like them all, she was apt to like people, and had no objection to men wanting to marry her. She thought it a pleasant, wholesome desire and confessed to her glass that if she were a man she would be mighty eager for Susan. She was not vain enough to suppose that they would seek her so zealously if she had only her fair body to give. But she did not blame them for wanting to marry her estates too. That also seemed to her a natural and healthy ambition. And indeed they were very healthy creatures, these Cotswold swains, but not light of hand, not graceful.

Miss Lovel having sat through a dinner with half a dozen of them, left them to their wine and swept into the garden. She had good reason to fear that Mr. Mustoe was approaching the moment when he would sing. But he was not allowed to sing long, or he was left without an audience. They came about where she was listening to a blackbird among the lilac, and of course the blackbird fled scolding.

"Faith, I almost agree with him," said Miss Lovel.

"What was he saying, ma'am?" cried Hugh Tanfield, who prided himself on his readiness. "I don't know any naughty words." So somebody had to swear there was little Hugh did not know in that kind: and every one in turn had the same great joke flung at him.

"Oh, you are all sad rascals. It is agreed," says the lady. "But it does not make you amusing."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"She likes the bird better," Mr. Tanfield tried to shine again. "Pray, ma'am, was he singing of love?" And then Mr. Tanfield was desired not to do so and he protested that he knew no more of love than singing and was told the girls at Stow did not say so and the lady passed on.

Ned Mustoe came to her side and began to tell her of a little mare he had, the daintiest thing, by Whirlwind, but his own breeding, a lady's horse. If Miss Lovel would do him the honour——

The lady was delivered from this embarrassment by a guffaw in the rear. Mr. Tanfield had caught sight of the progress of Sir William Zouch. Mr. Tanfield embraced a man on either side of him. "For the love of God, what is it?" he cried. "A butter woman going to market—with a wooden leg—look, Jerry, what is it?"

"It is a friend of mine, Mr. Tanfield," said Miss Lovel. "Pray give me leave." She swept across the lawn, unhurried, swift.

"That puts you down, Hugh," his friends chuckled.

Sir William was at the door and telling his servant to come help him down when he saw her. He sat still in his ludicrous position, but he winced and looked down as he pulled off his hat.

"It is kind of you to seek us out, sir," she said gravely.

"Egad, madam, I wasn't seeking you," Sir William grunted. "And, faith, it's not Miss Lovel I would choose to see me so. As old as I am, I have my vanities." He beckoned to his stolid servant. "Here, fool, give me your shoulder." He slid to the ground with a groan. "I come begging, ma'am."

She came to him. "You will take my arm, sir."

"Faith, I am too heavy for you, my dear," he said and leaned on her heavily enough as she led him into the house. "That is enough for one spell," he grunted and dropped on to a settle in the hall.

"Pray, sir, what has happened?"

"An old fool has fallen off his horse, ma'am. And the fool of a horse fell on him. I have a leg that will neither ride nor walk. There's a sprain and the bruising has waked the gout in it, I believe." He laughed. "A thousand pardons, I am mighty tedious with my woes. The sum of all

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

is, I have to beg you for a lodging. Thy servant can go nowhither."

"Sir, I am sorry for the cause that brings you, but very glad that you are come to us," says the lady. Mr. Fettiplace arrived, beaming and curious. "Here is Sir William Zouch, sir, who comes to us hurt and asks pardon for it."

"Sir, sir, you are very welcome," the old gentleman smiled and rubbed his hands. "Not fallen among thieves, I hope?"

"Lord, no. Only on stony ground, but I have enough."

"Why, if you had to fall, sir, I am glad you chose to fall near Ashcombe."

"Faith, no choice of mine, Mr. Fettiplace. I don't know your hills. I have been with Chris Paget in Warwickshire, I was hurrying down to do some business with my cousin at Salisbury and never knew Ashcombe was on my way. But for a civil fellow who picked me up I should not have come to plague you. He told me Ashcombe was the nearest house and brought me to the gate."

"Who is our friend, sir?" says the lady.

"A pleasant youth, a Mr. Botynor."

She looked at Mr. Fettiplace. "I think we do not know him, sir," she said with lifted brows. "Is it possible? Is there a gentleman of Cotswold we do not know?"

Sir William laughed. "What, there is none of them neglects Miss Lovel? Many Jasons come in quest of her! but I'll warrant this lad a gentleman."

"Botynor?" said Mr. Fettiplace. "It is a good name. This must be the boy from Prior's Humble. I should like to see him."

"He was shy, sir. He said he had not the honour to know you. Ingenui vultus puer ingenuique pudoris. I mean he hath a pretty modesty, ma'am. So have not I, egad. I believe I must ask you if I may have a room."

"I am ashamed, sir," she cried. "We keep you in talk while you suffer." She clapped her hands and called servants and turned to Mr. Fettiplace. "My dear, where is there a surgeon in these wilds? At Stow? Or should we send to Burford?"

"Lord no," says Sir William quickly. "No leech for

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

me, ma'am. I shall be well enough when the leg is out of the boot and into flannel. My fellow can doctor me. It is but the sprain on a gouty member." Mr. Fettiplace boasting some knowledge of medicine, offered his attention, but the sufferer protested he must not be troublesome.

"You are under authority, sir," said Miss Lovel. "Take my arm." And she led him limping away to bed and consigned him to his silent servant and Mr. Fettiplace and returning to her disconsolate suitors ordered Mr. Tanfield to ride to Stow for the apothecary. It seemed good to the others to take their leave lest a worse thing happened to them.

In the midst of their farewells arrived Sir Charles Monox, who watched them go with stately amusement. "It's a rare privilege to find Miss Lovel alone. By their faces, they grudge it me."

"Lord, sir, they know I am safe with you. It is not you that has put them out of countenance."

"Miss Lovel is pleased to be cruel?"

"When did you find me cruel, sir? I protest it is not in me. No, Miss Lovel was thinking of something else."

"Oh, torture!" Sir Charles smiled.

"Pray sir, did Lady Monox never think of something else —before she was married?"

"You have my leave to ask her," says Sir Charles quietly. "She hopes Miss Lovel will honour her to dinner on Friday."

"With all my heart."

Sir Charles said something about a family dinner and hoping for Mr. Fettiplace. It was plain that he wanted to speak to Mr. Fettiplace.

"Why, sir, he is with Sir William Zouch now. But they shall tell him you are here."

"Sir William Zouch?" says Sir Charles hastily. "No, no. No matter. Sir William Zouch, madam? I did not know he was in Cotswold."

"Nor I, faith. But here he is. He had a fall riding over the hills and came here hurt."

"I am sorry," said Sir Charles.

"You know him, sir?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"As one knows men in London, madam. I did not know he was a friend of yours."

"He has a pleasant temper," said Miss Lovel.

Sir Charles laughed. "Oh, a fine gentleman to be sure," and he took his leave.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER VII

MR. TWISS FINDS FRIENDS

MR. FETTIPLACE reported to his granddaughter that the poor fellow was of a rich spirit and a scholar, but did not explain him more precisely. The apothecary pronounced the gentleman's leg of a podagric habit, tumid from groin (asking the lady's pardon), to the pedal digits, with little extravasation, but inflamed in the genual and talic mechanism. He prescribed rest and light diet and would send a draught and James's powder. Proper treatment might so purify the natural vigour of good blood that the gentleman would be on his legs again in a month.

So Sir William was established at Ashcombe and Mr. Fettiplace spent a happy evening trying his quality with Homer and Apollonius Rhodius. The next day he was limping into the library with his leg in a roll of flannel, and writing a pretty copy of verses to Miss Lovel's bodkin. For she brought her embroidery and sat with him to the desolation of George Mustoe, who had his chestnut mare at the door for her, and the dumb bewilderment of Tom Eltone and his mamma, who found themselves in a conversation about mysterious creatures called Filicaja and Goldoni.

From that day it was rumoured in Cotswold that Miss Lovel wore blue stockings and had brought down a queer old put from London to read Hebrew with her.

The lady, indeed, though her admirable legs wore no blue, and Sir William Zouch, whatever his foibles, had nothing of the pedant, chose to be something learned with him. She desired, you may believe, a change from the artless mirth of her young squires, but it amused her also to try Sir William's quality. He was the first man who had ever

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

puzzled her. She was too much a woman, or, if you please, too innocent, to doubt that the man's injury and his pain were real. But it did not escape her that he was well content to establish himself at Ashcombe and proposed to give her his company for some time, and she wondered why. For she could not believe that Sir William had a natural affection for the country and the society of a country house. He was plainly a man of the town. She did not suspect that he was (in that phrase he was rather too fond of) one of the " many Jasons come in quest of her." He showed no enterprise : in fact he was far more subdued than he had been in London. His way with her was measured, kindly but paternal. He showed no eagerness for her company. To have Mr. Fettiplace to himself pleased him very well : and Mr. Fettiplace when put to the question about this reported that they talked Greek and Sir William was a very pretty scholar. Yet it seemed to Miss Lovel not wholly credible that Sir William was staying at Ashcombe to talk Greek. He did not look that kind of man : in London he had not been that kind of man. She was interested in him.

The creature knew his way among books. He could hold his own with her and something more. He had an experienced taste too. He turned a neat verse. He had his notions of music. He could talk of pictures as elegantly as Mr. Walpole. A very queer fellow to plant himself in Cotswold. But there was no denying he was good company.

So she amused herself happily with Sir William, who continued to limp in a bundle of flannel and consume James's powder and was slow to think his leg well enough to be jolted in her coach.

When she dined with Lady Monox, she heard Sir Charles asking Mr. Fettiplace after his invalid and listening with a sneer to the old gentleman's assurance that he was an excellent fellow, of a right scholarly wit. " I believe you should be careful, sir. Sir William Zouch has no good fame."

" What, sir, a rake ? " Miss Lovel cried.

" Faith, I was not speaking for your ear, madam," says Sir Charles coldly.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"But tell me the worst! Every woman loves a rake."

"I don't presume to advise Miss Lovel," Sir Charles bowed. "But her friends will be glad to hear the gentleman is recovered."

"Fie, sir, Miss Lovel is in no danger," says my lady.

"Pray, ma'am, what is this terrible fellow?"

"He is worse than a rake, my dear. He is a Whig," my lady smiled.

"Oh Lord, will he bite me?" says Miss Lovel.

But my lady seeing her lord's frowns talked of something else.

It is possible that this small passage of arms incited Miss Lovel to parade herself in Sir William's company. She was quite capable of such perversity. What is certain is that she insisted (the gentleman was backward), his health would be the better of air, and took him in her coach down the valley and over the hills, to the dismay of all her young gentlemen and the wrath of their mothers.

On one of these journeys the coach had laboured up to the lonely, windswept hills, beyond Naunton, bare turf rolling for long miles, unbroken by hedge or wall, marked only by sheep and ancient tracks which darkened the close grass or made yellow scars. There it pleased her to stop the coach and order Sir William out of it, for she said the air was the elixir of life, so clear and pure it was and of such subtle, quickening fragrance.

"It's very well, ma'am": Sir William opened his nostrils. "It is like the white wine of Montepulciano."

"Sir, you are gross," says she. "I bring you to a wind from heaven and you talk of wine! What is man that I am mindful of him!"

"The skeleton at the feast, ma'am. The slave behind your chair to remind you that you are mortal."

"A base custom, sir," Mr. Fettiplace put in eagerly, "a Roman use, and like all true Roman things, ignoble."

"Fie, sir, I am here to be worshipped," says the lady. "That is your part."

"Why, so I do. But golden girls must turn to dust," Sir William smiled at her.

"Oh, you are melancholy, you are moral."

"I believe you are the first woman that told me so,"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

says Sir William. "But what's the moral? Then be not shy, but use the time, and while you may, go marry."

"Let us eat, drink, and be married, for to-morrow we die. But I will not say so. Have I not told you (faith, it was you who should tell me) I am divine." She stood still, her bosom proud, taking her joy of the world.

"I believe and tremble," Sir William shrugged, "like the devils."

They stood looking into the west wind, and were aware of a horseman jogging towards them. He came to the crest of the down where the grass-grown road split into four tracks and he could see still more diverging from them on either side below, and there he halted looking about him.

"He's come to heaven and wants to get out, ma'am," Sir William said. "Mighty human."

"This way and that dividing his swift mind," says Mr. Fettiplace in Greek.

"Stranger, who are you?" Sir William capped the quotation. "At adventure do you rove, like a pirate?"

The gentleman saw them and came on to explain himself. "I'll ask your pardon," he took off his hat revealing a large face with very little nose. "Could you tell me now, what's my way to Battle Manor?" He looked from one to the other with an ingratiating smile which stiffened into a fixed grin as his eyes came upon Sir William, and at Sir William he stared.

"Faith, sir, I can't help you," Sir William shrugged. "I am a stranger myself."

"That's your road to Battle, sir," Mr. Fettiplace pointed. "Eight miles down hill. Bear to your right hand beyond the ford. It is straight before you till then. You have a pleasant ride, sir, and you go to a pleasant place."

"I thank ye. I thank ye," said Mr. Twiss and set his horse going.

"The gentleman is in a hurry," Sir William stared after him. "Battle Manor—is that Monox's house, sir?"

"Yes, to be sure," says Mr. Fettiplace, and remembering that Sir Charles strongly disapproved of Sir William, tried

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

to change the subject with something about the time when the monks had a vineyard in the valley.

But Susan did not choose to help him out: "Pray, sir, did you know the gentleman?" says she.

Sir William would not understand that she was speaking to him. "Who, I? Not from Adam. Though I guess Adam had a better nose."

"I thought he knew you."

"More people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows," Sir William shrugged.

"I could never think they made good wine," Mr. Fettiplace chirped on. "Though I have drunk wine made in Picardy."

"Sir, I have drunk lemonade," says Sir William, "but under compulsion," and he made a face at Miss Lovel who had prepared it for him. "Who gave you the cup of bitterness?" And Mr. Fettiplace was started on stories of his youth.

Mr. Twiss, riding his tired horse hard, came to Battle Manor before dinner time. Sir Charles was walking on the terrace with Lethenard and the sound of his horse disturbed their conference. "Who's your dusty friend, Charles," said Lethenard. "Faith, he has no mercy on his horse. Look, the poor brute is bloody with spurring. Egad, it is Twiss, the Irishman."

Sir Charles shouted for a groom. They took Mr. Twiss, who was effusive, indoors. "You are something more than welcome, sir," said Sir Charles. "I see that you have lost no time. Let me thank you, who need no thanks in the King's service, I know. Pray, what have you brought us?"

"Ah, let me moisten my clay," Mr. Twiss flung himself into a chair and stretched out his dusty, blood-stained legs. "I am parched and crumbling, begad. The devil of a ride I have had of it. It's a wild, desolate country you live in. Not a tavern in twenty miles. Sure, you're barbarians." He put his face under a tankard. "Ah, but that's Christian malt." He grinned at them. "Well, now, this is the devil of a business you've brought me to. Do you know who you have here in Cotswold? Old Zouch is among you. Old Zouch, that was spying in Rome ten years past."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"We know of him, sir. It is an unlucky chance, but no more than a chance, I conceive. We do not fear him."

"But how did you know, Twiss?" says Lethenard.

"Haven't I seen him?" Mr. Twiss cried. "Faith, I was asking my way of a fine girl when I saw his ugly red face behind her."

"And I suppose you told him you were coming to Battle Manor?"

"Why, then, what else would I ask for?"

"And did Sir William know your pretty face?"

"Ah, I'll not believe it! He looked as dull as a round of beef."

"But he knew you in Rome?"

"Can I help it, sir?" Mr. Twiss grew truculent. "I was waiting on the King while the old spy was nosing about Rome. It was not for me to flinch from him. Faith, I used to cock my hat in his fat face."

Lethenard turned to Sir Charles and shrugged.

"How the devil was I to know you would have the rogue on the watch here?" Mr. Twiss cried. "Faith, you should have given warning the thing was blown upon."

"Do not believe it, sir," says Sir Charles with dignity. "I promise you you have nothing to fear. The gentleman is in Cotswold about his own business, not ours. Let it go. And now, sir, I conceive you have not come to us with empty hands."

"Ah, faith, I have the most gracious messages to you from His Majesty. He was pleased to say that you were a very loyal and trusty gentleman, Sir Charles, and bade me let you know that he thanked you for your endeavours. 'Tell him that he is much in my thoughts,' says he, 'and I pray he may be wisely guided.'"

"Mr. Twiss, I am your obliged servant," says Sir Charles gravely.

"And is that all, Twiss?" said Lethenard.

Mr. Twiss glared. "Faith, there was nothing for you, sir."

"You are come all the way from Rome for that? Egad, His Majesty is mighty civil."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I would not speak so, Geoffrey," says Sir Charles with dignity. "Pray, Mr. Twiss, do you bring me nothing more particular?"

"That was the whole of it indeed. There was no more passed."

Lethenard looked at him keenly. "So. Not a word in writing?"

"There was a trifle of a letter from the secretary," Mr. Twiss said. "That's my Lord Lismore, sir, a formal fellow. But it has gone astray. Look you, sir," he became suddenly truculent again, "I had no more than put my foot ashore in your damned country when I was set upon by a pack of rogues and hardly came off with my life. Look you there now," he plucked open his coat and shirt and showed fresh scars on his chest, "I have lain on my back in Gloucester this two weeks with the holes in me healing and the fevers of hell upon me."

"So the letter was taken from you two weeks ago," Lethenard laughed. "And we hear of it to-day. Damme, Twiss, you have done well."

"Me, is it?" Mr. Twiss roared. "And is it my fault I was sent where the spies was waiting for me? Do you know what I think of you? I think you have a traitor or two among you."

"No, Twiss Oh, no," Lethenard laughed. "I'll not believe it. A fool, maybe, but no traitor."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Sir Charles held up his hands. "Pray, Mr. Twiss, don't be so loud. This is grave news, sir. Let us have it plain and clear. You brought——"

"Egad, Charles, we can have no more now," says Lethenard who was by the window. "Here is my lady with company."

"By your leave, there is time enough. You brought one letter from my Lord Lismore, sir? You had it safe when you landed? Pray where did you lose it?"

"In Gloucester, sir, the very night I came to the town I was set upon in a dark alley. Ah, devil doubt it, there was them that knew of my coming and what I had on me. To tell you my mind, Sir Charles, some of your friends have passed the word and I was watched from the time

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

I started. There was a young fellow on the ship——"

The voice of Lady Monox was heard calling on her husband. "Give me leave, sir," says Sir Charles and went out.

Mr. Twiss found himself looking at Lethenard, whose eyes were not sympathetic. "So there was a young fellow on the ship," says Lethenard. "And I suppose you told him you were carrying a letter from King James.

"I told him nothing at all, sir," Mr. Twiss flushed. "But he was devilish curious. And by my soul, I believe he was put to spy on me and it's himself that had the letter. Will you tell me now, Mr. Lethenard, how would any man know there was a letter coming to Gloucester if some of you weren't leaking?"

Lethenard laughed—and frowned. "Where did you pick up this fellow? On ship board?"

"Faith, he was following me all the way from Avignon to Bordeaux. Then I found him on the ship. I landed before him and there he was at Gloucester waiting for me and——"

Sir Charles came back and held up his hand. "No more of this, now, sir. Let me present you to Lady Monox."

My lady sat in the hall talking to Peter Botynor.

Mr. Twiss saw. Mr. Twiss turned pale. "And, begad, it's himself," he hissed into Lethenard's ear. "There he is, the devil."

Lethenard burst out laughing. "What! My Twiss, is it you?" says Peter. "Journeys end in lovers meeting, my Twiss." And he laughed too.

"You are very merry people," my lady opened her fine eyes. But Mr. Twiss was not.

Sir Charles led him to the lady and he made a sulky bow. "I think you know my brother, sir," says she.

With a gloomy, dazed eye Mr. Twiss contemplated Peter.

He remained throughout dinner in a state of abstraction upon which only Sir Charles felt a duty to intrude. My lady and the other gentlemen amused themselves very well. But after the port was on the table, she did not stay long. "I think I am in the way," she looked at her hus-

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

band and rose. "Come, Peter, keep me company." She took his arm. Peter smiled at Mr. Twiss and went with her.

She arranged herself on a couch in her drawing-room. "They don't want us, my dear," she said.

"I believe not. They are wrong, Dorcas. Have you had much of Mr. Twiss?"

"I have never seen the creature till now. Who is he, Peter?"

"Faith, you had better ask Charles."

"Oh, he is some Jacobite messenger, it's plain enough," she sighed. "But you know more of him. There is something between you."

"The man is an ass, my child You might hint that to the great Charles."

Lady Monox turned on her cushions. "You are a little short with me, Peter. Pray, are you angry with us?"

Peter laughed. "Dorcas, I admire you infinitely. But I have known you quite a long while. Yes, you are very pretty when you are pathetic. And what is it you want, ma'am?"

"Peter!" the lady protested. "Do you know you talk to me as if you were an old man and I a child."

"No, oh no. Like a son to his mother when the rascal has grown a man. The way of the world, ma'am."

The lady smiled affectionately. "Indeed, you are a man," she confessed. "Mr. Peter is sufficient to himself. But it is a little hard for me. You come home after so long—and how often have you been to see me, sir? You stay at Priors and keep to yourself. You do not even go to the houses where we go. No, sir, you are not kind."

"It is true I have not been to worship the goddess," said Peter.

"Goddess?" my lady made big eyes. "Oh, you laugh at me. And pray, sir, why will you not go to Ashcombe? Susan Lovel is my dear friend, and I would have her yours too."

"Which is not the same thing. I am frightened of her perfections, my lady."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"You choose to tease me. I wish you knew Mr. Fettiplace, the dearest, gentlest creature. But you do not care what I say. You will not even come here. And I want you, Peter. It would be so good for Charles."

Peter began to laugh. "Oh, wife!" he pinched the lady's chin and saw how grave she was and stopped laughing. "Why, if you look like that, I am at your orders. Fie, child, you are not frightened of all this stuff. It is an old, old game."

"I should like you to be with him, dear," she sighed satisfaction. "You are so reasonable."

It occurred to Peter Botynor that a man always is when he does what a woman wants. But he did not say so. He surveyed his sister with rueful admiration. He had no desire to assist at the conspiracies of Sir Charles. The good Charles was so majestic. But he beheld another reason why Dorcas had brought him back to Cotswold. In the intervals of marrying Miss Lovel he was to keep Charles out of mischief. It seemed likely that he would need some tact to satisfy everybody.

Upon these disconcerting meditations Lethenard arrived. He was suffering from amusement. "I hope I don't break in on a family affair, my lady?" he chuckled. "I have just fled from one."

"We count Mr. Lethenard one of the family," says the lady.

"But what's the matter, Lethenard?" Peter was surprised. "Is my Twiss telling Charles about our family skeletons?"

"Why no, not now, I think. Not any more. It is more likely that Charles is kicking him downstairs, as a duty to the family. But the family skeleton was what Mr. Twiss wanted to talk about, Peter."

"God bless him, he's a marvel," said Peter.

Lady Monox looked from one merry gentleman to the other. "What is all this?" she said.

"My lady, I am your skeleton," Peter smiled. "I am the villain of the family. I am the blot on the escutcheon. Didn't you know?

"I know that you are a goose," says my lady.

"Who slit the hide of the Chevalier Twiss? Who

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

band and rose. "Come, Peter, keep me company." She took his arm. Peter smiled at Mr. Twiss and went with her.

She arranged herself on a couch in her drawing-room. "They don't want us, my dear," she said.

"I believe not. They are wrong, Dorcas. Have you had much of Mr. Twiss?"

"I have never seen the creature till now. Who is he, Peter?"

"Faith, you had better ask Charles."

"Oh, he is some Jacobite messenger, it's plain enough," she sighed. "But you know more of him. There is something between you."

"The man is an ass, my child You might hint that to the great Charles."

Lady Monox turned on her cushions. "You are a little short with me, Peter. Pray, are you angry with us?"

Peter laughed. "Dorcas, I admire you infinitely. But I have known you quite a long while. Yes, you are very pretty when you are pathetic. And what is it you want, ma'am?"

"Peter!" the lady protested. "Do you know you talk to me as if you were an old man and I a child."

"No, oh no. Like a son to his mother when the rascal has grown a man. The way of the world, ma'am."

The lady smiled affectionately. "Indeed, you are a man," she confessed. "Mr. Peter is sufficient to himself. But it is a little hard for me. You come home after so long—and how often have you been to see me, sir? You stay at Priors and keep to yourself. You do not even go to the houses where we go. No, sir, you are not kind."

"It is true I have not been to worship the goddess," said Peter.

"Goddess?" my lady made big eyes. "Oh, you laugh at me. And pray, sir, why will you not go to Ashcombe? Susan Lovel is my dear friend, and I would have her yours too."

"Which is not the same thing. I am frightened of her perfections, my lady."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"You choose to tease me. I wish you knew Mr. Fettiplace, the dearest, gentlest creature. But you do not care what I say. You will not even come here. And I want you, Peter. It would be so good for Charles."

Peter began to laugh. "Oh, wife!" he pinched the lady's chin and saw how grave she was and stopped laughing. "Why, if you look like that, I am at your orders. Fie, child, you are not frightened of all this stuff. It is an old, old game."

"I should like you to be with him, dear," she sighed satisfaction. "You are so reasonable."

It occurred to Peter Botynor that a man always is when he does what a woman wants. But he did not say so. He surveyed his sister with rueful admiration. He had no desire to assist at the conspiracies of Sir Charles. The good Charles was so majestic. But he beheld another reason why Dorcas had brought him back to Cotswold. In the intervals of marrying Miss Lovel he was to keep Charles out of mischief. It seemed likely that he would need some tact to satisfy everybody.

Upon these disconcerting meditations Lethenard arrived. He was suffering from amusement. "I hope I don't break in on a family affair, my lady?" he chuckled. "I have just fled from one."

"We count Mr. Lethenard one of the family," says the lady.

"But what's the matter, Lethenard?" Peter was surprised. "Is my Twiss telling Charles about our family skeletons?"

"Why no, not now, I think. Not any more. It is more likely that Charles is kicking him downstairs, as a duty to the family. But the family skeleton was what Mr. Twiss wanted to talk about, Peter."

"God bless him, he's a marvel," said Peter.

Lady Monox looked from one merry gentleman to the other. "What is all this?" she said.

"My lady, I am your skeleton," Peter smiled. "I am the villain of the family. I am the blot on the escutcheon. Didn't you know?

"I know that you are a goose," says my lady.

"Who slit the hide of the Chevalier Twiss? Who

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

picked his pocket? It is I. I dogged his heels from Avignon even unto Bordeaux. I lay lurking on his ship when he came aboard. I made the storm winds blow all the way from the Gironde to Avonmouth so that the Chevalier Twiss should be sick as never man was sick at sea before. Alone I did it. When he slipped ashore empty, oh, empty as the new-born babe, I dodged round by water to be before him at Gloucester. And there did I make holes in him and steal from him the papers which he bore from our rightful King to his trusty and well-beloved Charles Monox. Is that right, Lethenard?"

"That is most of it," Lethenard admitted. "But you leave out the passion, Peter. He was as passionate as a jack rabbit."

"You should see him when he is sea-sick."

"Fie, Peter. But this is a noxious creature," says my lady.

"I left Charles telling him so, madam," Lethenard smiled.

"Pray, sir, is it to such fellows you trust your secrets?"

"We do not, I hope. The man is an old servant of the King, madam."

"God save the King," Peter shrugged.

Sir Charles came in something hastily for him, and with a flush on his stately countenance. "Pray give me leave, madam. Peter, I must speak with you."

"Well, speak on. My lady knows all about our Twiss."

Sir Charles was not pleased. "I would not have had you troubled, madam," he bowed to his wife and sat down. "It is pestilent folly in this fellow, Peter. I owe you an apology, I conceive. I promise you I have schooled him. Pray tell me what you know."

"Why, I saw the fellow on the road in France. We were shipmates on the crossing. He was so mysterious and so suspicious that any man might guess he feared discovery. I found him at night in Gloucester half drunk with some fellows who had brought him into a dark alley. They set upon him, I beat them off, but not before they had him down. It is very possible they took papers from him. I can't tell."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"No. But he had papers, Peter," Lethenard said.

"Well, you know best what was in them," Peter shrugged.

"Little enough, as I guess," says Lethenard. "His Majesty is not much for action."

"You have no right to say that, Geoffrey," Sir Charles frowned.

"Faith, there may have been too much for our comfort if they go to the wrong hands," Lethenard said. "Our riddle is, where have they gone? Were these fellows who robbed Twiss after his purse or his papers, footpads or spies? You saw them, Peter."

"As one sees men in a brawl in the dark. I should have said they were common thieves if our Twiss had not carried these Jacobite papers, if our Twiss were not such an ass that any man could find out that he had papers. You are not fortunate in your messenger, Charles. The King don't choose his men very well."

"I fear he has few to choose from," said Sir Charles sadly.

"I wish to God he would choose Englishmen. But not he," says Lethenard. "Faith, he is the son of his father, who lost three kingdoms by that."

"England has not given him men to trust yet. That is what we have to do, Lethenard."

"Well, here am I," Lethenard laughed. "But what is to do now?"

"Why, send Twiss out of the country straight," said Peter quickly. "He knows more of you than any fool ought to know, Charles."

"I believe you are right," Sir Charles agreed. "The man is not trusty. A mean spirit."

"Yes. Peter's the wise man. We will send Twiss to the devil. Leave him to me, Charles. I will find a fellow who will take him off quietly. Faith, we'll not be tripped up by a Twiss. But I don't think the thing is blown upon. If the letter had gone to the government Twiss would have been laid by the heels before his wounds were closed. We shall do well enough if we see that Twiss has no more chance to blab."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Is he the only man who can?" said Peter.

"Why, what are you thinking of, Peter?"

"I am thinking you only see your own side of the board, Lethenard."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CROSSING OF THE STREAM

WHILE spring was still bright in the meadows summer came upon them suddenly. The day was warm, the air rich with sunshine and fragrance. Peter Botynor suffered from a gentle melancholy. He strolled beside his stream requiring some one to be merry with him. But the world was empty. He found Jessie Marner in the village and walked with her, but Jessie was not amused nor amusing. It became clear to Mr. Botynor that she was not thinking about him, and to such bad taste he made his bow. "Poor child, she seemed in a hurry," he sighed. "She is certainly much changed. I think I have noticed that before. I wonder why. I do not change." He wandered away across the fields and felt a lonely man.

Not till he came down into the next valley was his solitude broken. His path lay through clover and he was enjoying the scent of it and the murmur of the bees, when he saw a woman in front of him. She was small and trim, she swung her hat in her hand showing a burnished mass of black hair, she went lightly and sang snatches of a song about

> The very next morn, to be sure, they were wed,
> Sing hey-diddle, ho-diddle, hey-diddle down,
> Now when shall we see such a wedding in town?

"A pretty shape," Peter said, "a pretty voice. Come, you are worth a chorus, my dear." And he came in after her:

> Sing hey-diddle, ho-diddle, hey-diddle down,
> Now when shall we see such a wedding in town?

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

She looked back, showed him a little, dark, startled face, and hurried on, leaving him to bow to her back. The field was closed by a stone wall. She ran up the steps that made a stile, stood on the top hardly long enough to give him a glimpse of her ankles, and vanished.

But when Mr. Botynor came to the top she was sitting on the steps the other side. She smiled up at him and swung a little foot. "La, sir, I am in the way," says she.

Peter sat down above her. "But that is what you are for," said he.

"Oh, I thank you. And pray what are you for?"

"Why, madam, for your pleasure."

She looked up at him with a measuring eye. "La, now, aren't you humble? That's a new kind of gentleman."

"And have you tried many?" Peter said. He could not make up his mind about her. She was no farmer's girl. Her demure taffeta was of the town and in a pretty taste. But there was neither squire nor parson near who had such a daughter.

"Oh, sir, we see them on show in the market," she was saying which puzzled him the more. But she was a comely little creature, round in her slightness and of a merry red mouth. He decided that he was interested.

"And where are you going to, my pretty maid?"

"I was taking the air, kind sir, she said."

"May I go with you, my pretty maid?"

"Oh, aren't you frightened, kind sir, she said," and she started up and went on.

Peter jumped down to her side. "Why, what is there to be frightened of?"

She made a face at him. "Me!" she said. "Bo!"

"I dare say I am a goose. Now I think of it, other ladies have told me so——"

"La, what a gay time you have!"

"My sister, for instance——" Peter explained.

"Even his sister finds him a goose! There's a fellow!"

"Will you let me finish a sentence? I was going to point out, ma'am, that the goose is a brave bird."

"I like him with sage and onion," she confessed. "I

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

don't care much for his talk. He is too fond of saying the same thing." She put the tip of her tongue between her little teeth and hissed at Mr. Botynor.

"It doesn't suit you," said Peter. "A little creature like you should chirp."

"Twit, twit," says she pursing her lips.

"That is a pretty mouth," says Peter and kissed it.

"Oh fie," she pushed him away. "What a time it took you to come to that!"

"We are slow in the country," Peter said and put her arm under his. "But when we begin we go on."

"Mighty dull. I don't care how many times I begin. But I like a change soon."

"Madam is from the town?"

"Fie, you're not a civil gentleman. I am from heaven, of course. An angel. Don't you see my wings?" She moved her little shoulders.

Peter put his arm round them. "Faith, they're mighty pleasant," said he.

They were coming down a steep rough pasture to a stream which made wide amber water, sparkling over brown stones, deepening into dark pools. A row of stepping stones was set in it. But on the edge she stopped and turned to him. "Oh la! Where have you brought me? I'll never get over there."

"Lord, you need not wet your shoe," says Peter. "The stones are firm enough."

"But they're so far apart. Look, do you think my legs are as long as that?" She lifted her skirt and put out a slim leg in a great stride of some dozen inches and drew it back again and looked up at him pathetically.

Peter laughed. The lady's methods seemed to him simple. He picked her up and walked off with her. She gave a little scream. "Oh la, you frighten me," she said, but she put her arm round his neck and settled herself comfortably against him. "You great strong fellow," she laughed. But in the middle of this perilous crossing another cry came out of her and she jerked in his arms.

"Now what is that for?" Peter protested, who was caught on one leg and had to draw back and steady himself.

She held on by his head. His hat went down into the

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

water, his wig was dragged over one eye. "Pray, sir, put me down," says she.

He stooped and lowered her to the water. "Faith, it's what you deserve," he smiled.

She wriggled and clung to him both arms round his neck. "No, you mustn't! It's not fair. Oh don't, sir," the little face was really frightened.

"Then you must be a good baby," he stood up with her and saw out of the eye which his wig did not cover that on the farther bank there wandered a large woman. She seemed to take an interest in his fortunes, a bland, judicial interest.

"Oh, go on. Be quick!" says the girl in his arms.

"But that would be rude to you, my dear," said Peter. "How can I hurry to be free from your embraces?"

She let her arms fall, she turned her head away from him. But he took his time. It amused him to see that she was blushing. He had not thought that likely.

When he set her down on the bank, the large woman was near. She stood still and surveyed them. His damsel turned from him, smoothed down her dress and patted her hair and put on her hat. Then she chose to see the other woman. "Oh, my lady!" says she and made a curtsey.

"Pray, Kitty, have you paid the porter?" said a placid voice.

"Oh, madam, the gentleman would do it," Kitty hung her head.

"'Thus Kitty, beautiful and young,'" said the lady of the placid voice and contemplated Mr. Botynor who was setting his wig straight and went on with the poem—

"'Obtained the chariot for a day
And set the world on fire.'"

"Do you burn, sir?" she put back her head and looked at Mr. Botynor from half-shut eyes. "There is plenty of water. You might go in after your hat: which, I fear, is drowning."

Mr. Botynor did feel rather hot. The creature was altogether too magnificent: and he was well aware that he must look absurd. His wig was probably crooked even yet. But he had no notion of being disconcerted.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Madam, your most obedient," he said and sat down on the grass and began to take off his shoes and stockings.

A gasp that could be heard came from Kitty. "Nay then, run away, child," said her mistress. "You are too young to know that a man hath white legs." Kitty fled in disorder. Her mistress continued to contemplate the operations of Mr. Botynor.

He performed them in slow time and with caution, which indeed was necessary if he did not wish to fall down in the water, for the stream flowed over small movable stones, hard to bare feet, slippery, and it was difficult to tell the depth of a pool. But this circumspect paddling had a ceremonious air, as though Mr. Botynor's bare legs were describing the steps of a dance and danced, like Queen Elizabeth "high and disposedly."

This the large woman watched with brightening eyes and curving lips. "Sir, I suppose you have studied in Paris," she said. "Pray, is that Beaucourt's minuet?"

Mr. Botynor reached the pool in which his hat was slowly revolving. He took it and emptied it and made a measured progress to dry land. He did not answer her. He stood and looked down into the water and studied his reflection therein.

"The modern Narcissus," says the lady with a thrill in her voice. Mr. Botynor put his wig straight. She cried out a protest. "No, sir, you were more beautiful before. Art can but spoil you."

Mr. Botynor turned upon her. "Shall I appear in a state of nature? Madam, I blush for you."

"I had observed it, sir," says the lady: and indeed he was still something redder than his habit. "You are very obliging."

Mr. Botynor sat down and rubbed his legs and pulled on his stockings. This also she watched with benign attention. Mr. Botynor put on his shoes and stood up, squeezed the water out of his hat, and, using the water again as a mirror, put it on. He turned. "Madam, the play is over," he said and took off the hat again to make her a bow.

"Do not say so," she smiled. It was the first time in their acquaintance. "Sir, I hope you will live many happy years."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I shall strive to obey your ladyship's commands," says Mr. Botynor. But it seemed to him unfair that, smiling, she should look even more royal.

"What bewilders me is that I never knew you were in the world till now," the slow, placid voice said.

"My modesty keeps me back, madam," Mr. Botynor explained.

"Sir, my maid will be glad to know it," says the lady. "And pray, sir, may I tell her your modest name?"

Mr. Botynor thought that the time had come when he also could smile. "It is most gracious in your ladyship to be curious about me," he said meekly.

"But I am. I thought I had seen the face of every youth between Thames and Severn. Sir, I can scarcely believe that you exist."

Mr. Botynor again used the limp hat in a bow. "Madam, I see that I have the honour to behold the great Miss Lovel. I feel my unworthiness."

"I thank you. I am Susan Lovel," she made him a curtsey. "Pray, sir, shall I build here an altar to the unknown god?"

"Fie, would you worship a man?"

"Oh, sir, what else is a woman for?"

"At least do it discreetly. Worship the fellow, if you must. But not on your knees."

"It would perhaps make him ridiculous," the lady agreed. She contemplated the gentleman with that benign interest which first annoyed him. "I suppose the creature will always resent that, Mr. Botynor?"

Peter took a step back. "You win, Miss Lovel. Pray what do I owe you?"

"Your arm, sir," says she and took it and walked off with him. "Why has Mr. Botynor not come to Ashcombe? His sister is my dearest friend."

"Lord, ma'am, isn't that enough to keep a brother away?"

The lady smiled. "I promise you she has said no ill of you."

"No, not she," said Peter ruefully. "She has only told you I am the best man in the world."

"A dark beauty, said she. No giant, my dear, no, nor

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

yet a maypole. Something round, to be sure, in parts, but a comfortable figure of a man. Brown and rosy and of a merry eye and as kind as he looks. Yea, of a universal kindness. So she said and you see I knew you at once : as soon as I saw you with my maid."

" Yes, ma'am," said Peter meekly. " I suppose Kitty knew me too. I wish I had asked her."

" I thought the girl was kind enough," says the lady. " But, pray, sir, has Dorcas never talked to you of me ? "

" Yes, ma'am," Peter was still meek. " We are all kind in my family. Dorcas is very kind. She told me that Miss Lovel was a divine creature : stately and benign : of a noble shape, white and gold like a lily : but with fire in her dark eyes."

" And so Mr. Botynor could not know me."

" But remember, I did. It is the one hit that I made. And yet I wonder that I could."

Susan looked at him. " Your sister was too kind to me ? " said the placid voice.

" Madam, no woman will ever be able to tell a man what you look like."

" The man means it for praise," she said, " of me or of himself."

" What I complain of in Dorcas is that she said nothing of your smile."

" Sir, she was never so comical as her brother."

" A smile," Mr. Botynor, looking at her critically, went on with his own subject, " a smile not womanly, not even human——"

" Oh, this is bitterness, this is revenge."

" A smile like life : life laughing for joy in its power."

" Over Mr. Botynor ? " She allowed him to see that smile again.

Peter Botynor resumed control over himself. " It is possible that I am talking nonsense. My one fault, ma'am. Dorcas will tell you so."

" I shall tell Dorcas," says the lady, " that she was quite right."

" Pray, don't, ma'am. She is far too sure of that already. It is harassing to a brother. But how was she right ? "

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"She said something about you which—which it is not in my heart to tell you."

"I know," said Peter with melancholy confidence. "She said that I was a goose."

"Indeed, that is one way to put it," the lady agreed.

"Madam, I believe you are not a sister?"

"Fie, sir, all men are brothers, so all women——"

"Are their sisters. A grim world. But I will not believe it. You are certainly nobody's sister."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I am not afraid of you, madam."

"Are you not, Mr. Botynor? Patience. Everything comes to him who waits."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER IX

IN DIFFERENT KEYS

THE hall at Ashcombe gave forth a noise. In it they found Mr. Fettiplace doing his best with a party of young gentlemen, looking, as it seemed to the irreverent mind of Peter Botynor, like a nervous bird in a cage.

They buzzed in a cluster about the lady, who commended Peter to Mr. Fettiplace and put them by and vanished. They turned on Peter and made simple jests at him and his good luck in keeping the lady to himself, but without malice, for no man in Cotswold suspected Peter Botynor of enterprise. And Peter amused himself with the contrast between his homespun and worsted and their effulgence, for he had a perverse pride in going shabby, and wondered if the poor girl had as many fellows about her every day.

But in fact the number of Miss Lovel's suitors was not as great as when she first shone upon Cotswold. Some impatient youths had lost their temper with a girl who was calmly blind to their charms. Some had found the sardonic presence of Sir William Zouch uncomfortable and resolved to wait till the queer old put had gone. But Peter, who knew nothing of these disappointments, thought the place crowded and was sorry the girl should be plagued so. He sat himself down in a corner and looked up at the carving wherewith the Fettiplaces of the past had set forth their glories, the double silver chevrons on the coats of arms which declared their gentility, the angular, twisted woolstaplers' marks which recorded the origin of their wealth, and he reflected on the ignominy of life. Their labour and their passion and their high hopes had availed only to bring forth one virgin whom all the silly fellows in Cotswold

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

hunted like hounds to devour her. Peter Botynor despised mankind and was hot with virtue. A state so rare with him that he began to laugh.

At this stage in his progress Lethenard came in and (as Peter confessed to himself) looked like a dog of breeding in a pack of curs. Young fellows were not apt to joke with Mr. Lethenard unless he asked for it. He was received with respect, and with grave respect he greeted Mr. Fettiplace. who could be seen to flinch. But Lethenard had nothing more than civilities to say. He turned and changed nods and easy words with the others, and, when he had noticed everybody, came back to Mr. Fettiplace and talked of his farm. "The old fellow is afraid of him," says Peter to himself. "What's the matter?" He came out of his corner and joined them."

"Lord, Peter, are you here?" Lethenard laughed. "I thought you had renounced the world."

"I hope I am not in your way," said Peter meekly.

"My dear lad!" Lethenard clapped him on the shoulder. "You were never in anyone's way."

"That's a high praise, sir," Mr. Fettiplace chirped and smiled at Peter. "It tells of a kindly spirit and——"

"Oh, sir, we all love our Peter."

"And a shrewd judgment, I was going to say," Mr. Fettiplace persisted. "A man that hath both is something rare."

"And so he is," Lethenard agreed with good will.

Peter cared but little what Mr. Lethenard or Mr. Fettiplace thought of him. What interested him in the conversation was the evidence that Mr. Fettiplace did not like Lethenard.

Miss Lovel was coming down stairs. She had changed her plain grey gown for something that shimmered in peacock blue and green and bared her bosom. Peter drew back. He suffered from an absurd desire that she should not see him.

Lethenard had no such alarm. He was first at the foot of the stair. "Why, it is Mr. Lethenard," says the lady with some surprise in her slow, soft tone. "I thought he was gone on a journey, or, peradventure, he slept and must be awakened."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I am proud that you marked my absence, ma'am," Lethenard smiled.

"Lord, one marks the absence of many things," the lady put back her head to look at him, "the sun, the flies, a footstool.

"Which am I, ma'am?"

"What would you like to be?"

"Miss Lovel's faithful servant."

"Pray, Mr. Lethenard, don't you find it possible?"

And in the background Peter was trying to put his mind in order, thus: "Here is her majesty in state. Mine eyes dazzle. Lord, she becomes it well. She is made for splendour. It's a woman in the grand manner. But she hath a generosity. Here I am to please you, says she. Lord, she is nobly designed. And a strong creature, too. She moved light as if she floated down. She stands there free in all her splendour. But how white she is. Lily petals, that bosom, white and lustrous. And it hath a dainty fine grace. What was that picture in Venice, the three Graces? But she is all white."

Mr. Fettiplace had been talking to him. Something about the family of Monox. It had not been necessary to answer Mr. Fettiplace Miss Lovel was speaking again. "Well sir, let us go in," Lethenard offered his arm. "Where is Mr. Botynor? He is the stranger?" Peter became suddenly eloquent to Mr. Fettiplace, who beamed upon him and took his arm and chirped out, "I have Mr. Botynor for my share, my dear." So they sat down to dinner with the length of the table to protect Mr. Botynor from the lady.

Lethenard at her side looked down the company with smiling surprise. "Why, madam, I hope your patient has not taken a turn for the worse."

"Who is my patient, sir?"

"I don't see Sir William Zouch. Does he keep his room, ma'am? Or is he healed and gone?"

"Sir William thanks Mr. Lethenard for kindly sympathy. He is not healed and only gone a little way. In fact, sir, the brave gentleman is weary of being a cripple and must needs try if he can ride. So he is ridden to Stow to show his leg to the apothecary."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I wish him a happy deliverance from all his afflictions," said Lethenard.

"You have known Sir William this long while?"

Lethenard smiled. "Why, to touch hats when we pass. It's a fine gentleman of the town and I am a country bumpkin. When I have saved my sixpences for a jaunt to London some fellows are good enough to open their houses to me because I had a grandfather or so, and I live for a week in the world. So I have seen Sir William."

"You need not call yourself a bumpkin, sir. That is what I was meant to say, is it not? Well, I am gracious, I say it. You don't smell of innocence and haycocks, Mr. Lethenard." Some simple youth had to break in and warn her that there was nothing innocent about Lethenard. They waited till he had finished. He found the air frigid.

Then Lethenard said, "I don't know that innocence and haycocks go together. But I am a countryman made not born. My mother, poor girl, brought me into the world in Paris. I was bred there in anterooms. Hence my exquisite grace, madam. I did not come to plough in Cotswold till I was grown a man."

"You talk as if you had never been a child."

"I don't care to remember it, ma'am. Faith, it's a mighty bad way to begin life."

"You have not been fortunate, sir," she said gently.

"Oh, I thank you, I would as soon be myself as anyone else I have known." He looked at the table and laughed.

"Some of us are happy."

"They have my leave," Lethenard said. "I don't desire to live satisfied, ma'am."

She smiled at him. "I think there is no fear, sir."

"At least, I have far to go yet."

"Good fortune, Mr. Lethenard," she drank to him.

"I will wish you great adventures," says the gentleman draining his glass.

"We are like children giving presents," she said and rose. "We wish one another what we like ourselves. But you have the finer taste, sir," and she left them.

Lethenard did not stay long with the wine. He found her again in a window seat of her drawing-room. "Do I break in on your thoughts, madam?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

She was looking out through the white lilac which brushed against the window, to the golden iris by the stream. She turned to him. "Well. It would be an adventure," she said slowly. "And what do you bring to my thoughts, sir?"

"Myself, madam. It is only fair, for you will not be gone out of mine."

"I thought Mr. Lethenard's mind was set on great adventures. Sir, there is nothing venturous in me."

"Are you sure of that? Well, time will show."

She stirred. "Pray, sir, are you frank with yourself? What do you believe you will do in Cotswold?"

"I believe nothing, madam," Lethenard laughed. "I was not born with faith. My father used up what was in our blood. Do you know our story? He lost all that he could lose for King James. What I live upon is a farm which my mother's friends bought her that she might have somewhere in England to die. I have nothing to lose that I value but my head. Well, I stake that. What shall we do in Cotswold? We shall play high. We shall play out the game. Win or lose, I can't tell. I believe nothing. But if I believed I should lose, I should still make my stake."

"Pray, sir, are there many of your temper with you?"

"Most men play to win," Lethenard shrugged.

"But you for the joy of the game? Well, it is one way to live."

"I did not say that. It is not a man's life to live out his days like an ox. But I cannot choose. There are loyalties, madam. I must go with my friends. I must follow the King." He laughed grimly. "Wish me joy."

"Without faith and without hope?"

"My God, no. Faith? Well, that has failed too often. There is always hope till a man is broken. Come, madam, wish me joy."

"I wish you well, sir," she said gravely.

"But without hope and without faith?" Lethenard laughed as he flung back her own words. His eyes were bright upon her and he drew close. The lady did not shrink, did not refuse it when he laid his hand on hers.

"Sir, I think you will do much and I hope you will do well," the placid voice said. "But I cannot reckon with

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I wish him a happy deliverance from all his afflictions," said Lethenard.

"You have known Sir William this long while?"

Lethenard smiled. "Why, to touch hats when we pass. It's a fine gentleman of the town and I am a country bumpkin. When I have saved my sixpences for a jaunt to London some fellows are good enough to open their houses to me because I had a grandfather or so, and I live for a week in the world. So I have seen Sir William."

"You need not call yourself a bumpkin, sir. That is what I was meant to say, is it not? Well, I am gracious, I say it. You don't smell of innocence and haycocks, Mr. Lethenard." Some simple youth had to break in and warn her that there was nothing innocent about Lethenard. They waited till he had finished. He found the air frigid.

Then Lethenard said, "I don't know that innocence and haycocks go together. But I am a countryman made not born. My mother, poor girl, brought me into the world in Paris. I was bred there in anterooms. Hence my exquisite grace, madam. I did not come to plough in Cotswold till I was grown a man."

"You talk as if you had never been a child."

"I don't care to remember it, ma'am. Faith, it's a mighty bad way to begin life."

"You have not been fortunate, sir," she said gently.

"Oh, I thank you, I would as soon be myself as anyone else I have known." He looked at the table and laughed.

"Some of us are happy."

"They have my leave," Lethenard said. "I don't desire to live satisfied, ma'am."

She smiled at him. "I think there is no fear, sir."

"At least, I have far to go yet."

"Good fortune, Mr. Lethenard," she drank to him.

"I will wish you great adventures," says the gentleman draining his glass.

"We are like children giving presents," she said and rose. "We wish one another what we like ourselves. But you have the finer taste, sir," and she left them.

Lethenard did not stay long with the wine. He found her again in a window seat of her drawing-room. "Do I break in on your thoughts, madam?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

She was looking out through the white lilac which brushed against the window, to the golden iris by the stream. She turned to him. "Well. It would be an adventure," she said slowly. "And what do you bring to my thoughts, sir?"

"Myself, madam. It is only fair, for you will not be gone out of mine."

"I thought Mr. Lethenard's mind was set on great adventures. Sir, there is nothing venturous in me."

"Are you sure of that? Well, time will show."

She stirred. "Pray, sir, are you frank with yourself? What do you believe you will do in Cotswold?"

"I believe nothing, madam," Lethenard laughed. "I was not born with faith. My father used up what was in our blood. Do you know our story? He lost all that he could lose for King James. What I live upon is a farm which my mother's friends bought her that she might have somewhere in England to die. I have nothing to lose that I value but my head. Well, I stake that. What shall we do in Cotswold? We shall play high. We shall play out the game. Win or lose, I can't tell. I believe nothing. But if I believed I should lose, I should still make my stake."

"Pray, sir, are there many of your temper with you?"

"Most men play to win," Lethenard shrugged.

"But you for the joy of the game? Well, it is one way to live."

"I did not say that. It is not a man's life to live out his days like an ox. But I cannot choose. There are loyalties, madam. I must go with my friends. I must follow the King." He laughed grimly. "Wish me joy."

"Without faith and without hope?"

"My God, no. Faith? Well, that has failed too often. There is always hope till a man is broken. Come, madam, wish me joy."

"I wish you well, sir," she said gravely.

"But without hope and without faith?" Lethenard laughed as he flung back her own words. His eyes were bright upon her and he drew close. The lady did not shrink, did not refuse it when he laid his hand on hers.

"Sir, I think you will do much and I hope you will do well," the placid voice said. "But I cannot reckon with

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

you. You are romantic and I am not. You will ride at a blind hedge for the thrill of it. I choose to know what I am doing."

"Yes, madam. And then you will be bolder than ever I am," Lethenard said eagerly.

"Is it possible, Mr. Lethenard?" she smiled. "Well, I have never had occasion to be bold."

"Or to be afraid."

"That also is true, my friend," says she, looking at him steadily.

Lethenard kissed her hand. "You are a woman to die for."

"Why, that's a barren honour—for you and for me."

It was about this time that the other men came in upon them. But not Peter Botynor. Having by luck more than good judgment engaged Mr. Fettiplace on a demonstration that Virgil was a poet far inferior to Apollonius Rhodius, Peter found it possible to meditate on his own condition. The one thing of which he was certain was that he did not want to amuse Miss Lovel any more that day. Lethenard, he reflected, as he saw him leave the table to follow her, Lethenard would do that very well. Mr. Fettiplace was proving triumphantly that Virgil, though he might be the best of Romans, was a poet of a minor order. He had hardly finished when the other men began to go after the lady. "Pray, sir, make my excuses to Miss Lovel," says Peter. "I have far to go and I came afoot for I did not know that I should be brought to Ashcombe." He left Mr. Fettiplace persuaded that he was a charming fellow and a pretty scholar.

He took his time over that walk home, and before he was out of the Ashcombe valley had told himself that he was a fool to run away from her. An odd thing, faith, to be frightened of a girl because she was pretty. For there was no more than that in it after all. He did not mind her laughing at him or making others laugh if she chose. Mr. Botynor's cool and amiable temper had never been troubled by a joke against him. He was indeed rather inclined to enjoy it and encourage it. And for that matter, though the girl had wit enough, he did not doubt he could hold his own with her. In fact he had. He made a good game of

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

it. Yes. But it was not to be denied that he ended by running away from her.

Lord, he was not used to be shy when a girl was pretty. It was not the fault women commonly found with Mr. Botynor. His conscience acquitted him of that, suggested that he erred on the other side. To be sure, this girl was something more than pretty. A splendid creature. But what then? A man need not be dazed by a woman's body. He had never found one so rich and fine. Well, in the nature of things he must some day see the handsomest woman he would ever see. It was not matter for panic. Well, the girl was excellently made: but he contrived to bear that comfortably at first. It was as if he had not seen her clear till he saw her on the stair looking down at them, confound her. And yet he was aware she was beautiful while she walked at his side and it was easy to tell her so then—while she smiled. Lord, a man did not think of her body while she smiled like that. She had something else, if a man could put a name to it.

A man had best go home and cool his silly head.

His mind was in this turbid condition; he was on the hill from which he looked down to his own valley when Lethenard caught him up and went by with a lift of his whip and a laugh. "Ha, my Peter! You're a slow fellow. Pleasant dreams."

Lethenard's way to his upland farm led through the village of Upper Humble. He was upon the verge of it when he saw Sir William Zouch. By Sir William's bridle walked Jessie Marner, and she was looking at him and he bending over her, both talking earnestly.

Lethenard saw them before they saw him. He checked his horse and came on slowly. Sir William heard something. "Egad, it's Mr. Lethenard," he grinned, and Jessie stood still. She also looked at Lethenard, but she was not amused. "Ten thousand thanks, ma'am," Sir William made his bow. "I'll not need to trouble you more. I wager Mr. Lethenard can put me on the way to Ashcombe. Eh, Geoffrey? It's the way you have come I'll be bound."

"What, sir, have you lost yourself the first day you are out? Faith, you have no luck in Cotswold."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Lord, I'll not complain of it. It's a damned kind country, Geoffrey. I don't care how long I stay."

"Is the apothecary kind, too, sir?"

"A jewel of a fellow," Sir William laughed. "I believe he has fallen in love with my old leg he's so loth to part from it. A pretty thing to be sure"; he stuck out his large leg and contemplated it. "Well, I must be jogging. That is my way, is it? I'm devilish sorry I wasn't in when you came visiting. Better luck next time." He set his horse going.

Lethenard and Jessie looked at each other. "I suppose you don't mean to go with him," says the gentleman. She turned without a word and walked away. Lethenard came up beside her. "How long have you been so free with that fellow, Jessie?"

"What is it to you?" she said fiercely, hurrying on. He took hold of her shoulder and stopped her. "Well?" she faced him. "I suppose I can do as I like."

"I suppose you always did." Lethenard came out of the saddle and stood close and held her hands. "What are you doing now, Jessie?"

"It is nothing to you, Mr. Lethenard."

"Oh, you'll find it is, ma'am. You are not for that fat old rake."

"La, now, here's high talk. Is it you will choose my lovers for me? Indeed you are mighty obliging."

"What, he's a lover already? You go fast," Lethenard laughed. "It's a bad choice, my dear. He has not come here for your pretty eyes. He is a spy by trade. When he has sucked what he wants out of you, you may go to the devil."

She flushed. "I thank you for that!" she cried. "Oh, indeed, any man can do what he will with me. You should say so, should not you?" Tears began to come. She stamped her foot.

"There, child, I only mean to warn you," says Lethenard. "How should you know the fellow is a rogue."

"Indeed I don't. And I don't believe it neither. The gentleman was no more than civil," she sobbed.

"Mighty civil, I'll be bound. I shouldn't wonder if he talked as much about Mr. Lethenard as Miss Jessie."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"He did not then. He has never talked of you at all."

"Never? Oh, this is not the first time he has been private with you?"

"I hate you," said Jessie Marner.

"You had better hate him, child," Lethenard frowned but was not able to continue the argument. He saw the head of Peter Botynor coming over the wall. They drew apart. "Pray tell your father I'll wait on him, ma'am," says Lethenard loudly, made her a bow, mounted and rode off. The girl hurried into the village.

"The world is full of people to-day," said Peter sadly, "and they are all in a hurry."

On his way up the valley he had met Sir William Zouch. He was startled out of his meditations by a jovial shout. "Hallo, sir! Do you come from Ashcombe? Damme, it's my good Samaritan. How's all with you, sir?" Sir William stopped.

Peter gazed at the large, red face. "Sir, I am glad to see you can cross a horse again."

"What, I don't look such a fool this way?" Sir William grinned. "The old flesh is mending, thank 'e. I wax fat and kick, Mr. Botynor. Damned odd it's you I should be asking again for the way to Ashcombe. You're like a sign-post, Mr. Botynor, you point the way and never get there."

"Sir, I have just come from Ashcombe. I have to-day had the honour to be presented to Miss Lovel."

"Faith, you need not be so gloomy about it. You'll get over it, my lad. And so will she, I dare say. Well, this is the track to Ashcombe, then?"

"Pray, sir, who sent you this way?" said Peter; for Sir William's travelling adventures again seemed to him strange. He had told them at Ashcombe that he was riding to the apothecary at Stow. No man should be coming from Stow to Ashcombe by way of Upper Humble.

"I asked a girl in the village there. Has the jade put me wrong?"

"A pretty girl, sir?" Peter smiled.

"Well enough, you rogue. What, has she tricked me?"

"Sir, you know best. I was wondering what brought you to the village."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Lord, I'll not complain of it. It's a damned kind country, Geoffrey. I don't care how long I stay."

"Is the apothecary kind, too, sir?"

"A jewel of a fellow," Sir William laughed. "I believe he has fallen in love with my old leg he's so loth to part from it. A pretty thing to be sure"; he stuck out his large leg and contemplated it. "Well, I must be jogging. That is my way, is it? I'm devilish sorry I wasn't in when you came visiting. Better luck next time." He set his horse going.

Lethenard and Jessie looked at each other. "I suppose you don't mean to go with him," says the gentleman. She turned without a word and walked away. Lethenard came up beside her. "How long have you been so free with that fellow, Jessie?"

"What is it to you?" she said fiercely, hurrying on. He took hold of her shoulder and stopped her. "Well?" she faced him. "I suppose I can do as I like."

"I suppose you always did." Lethenard came out of the saddle and stood close and held her hands. "What are you doing now, Jessie?"

"It is nothing to you, Mr. Lethenard."

"Oh, you'll find it is, ma'am. You are not for that fat old rake."

"La, now, here's high talk. Is it you will choose my lovers for me? Indeed you are mighty obliging."

"What, he's a lover already? You go fast," Lethenard laughed. "It's a bad choice, my dear. He has not come here for your pretty eyes. He is a spy by trade. When he has sucked what he wants out of you, you may go to the devil."

She flushed. "I thank you for that!" she cried. "Oh, indeed, any man can do what he will with me. You should say so, should not you?" Tears began to come. She stamped her foot.

"There, child, I only mean to warn you," says Lethenard. "How should you know the fellow is a rogue."

"Indeed I don't. And I don't believe it neither. The gentleman was no more than civil," she sobbed.

"Mighty civil, I'll be bound. I shouldn't wonder if he talked as much about Mr. Lethenard as Miss Jessie."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"He did not then. He has never talked of you at all."

"Never? Oh, this is not the first time he has been private with you?"

"I hate you," said Jessie Marner.

"You had better hate him, child," Lethenard frowned but was not able to continue the argument. He saw the head of Peter Botynor coming over the wall. They drew apart. "Pray tell your father I'll wait on him, ma'am," says Lethenard loudly, made her a bow, mounted and rode off. The girl hurried into the village.

"The world is full of people to-day," said Peter sadly, "and they are all in a hurry."

On his way up the valley he had met Sir William Zouch. He was startled out of his meditations by a jovial shout. "Hallo, sir! Do you come from Ashcombe? Damme, it's my good Samaritan. How's all with you, sir?" Sir William stopped.

Peter gazed at the large, red face. "Sir, I am glad to see you can cross a horse again."

"What, I don't look such a fool this way?" Sir William grinned. "The old flesh is mending, thank 'e. I wax fat and kick, Mr. Botynor. Damned odd it's you I should be asking again for the way to Ashcombe. You're like a sign-post, Mr. Botynor, you point the way and never get there."

"Sir, I have just come from Ashcombe. I have to-day had the honour to be presented to Miss Lovel."

"Faith, you need not be so gloomy about it. You'll get over it, my lad. And so will she, I dare say. Well, this is the track to Ashcombe, then?"

"Pray, sir, who sent you this way?" said Peter; for Sir William's travelling adventures again seemed to him strange. He had told them at Ashcombe that he was riding to the apothecary at Stow. No man should be coming from Stow to Ashcombe by way of Upper Humble.

"I asked a girl in the village there. Has the jade put me wrong?"

"A pretty girl, sir?" Peter smiled.

"Well enough, you rogue. What, has she tricked me?"

"Sir, you know best. I was wondering what brought you to the village."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Sir William laughed. "Lord, Mr. Botynor, did I go out of my way? Mighty perplexing, these hills of yours. And she was a devilish neat thing. This is a straight track now, eh?" Off he went.

So when Peter came over the stile and saw Jessie Marner with Lethenard he must needs wonder whether Jessie Marner was Sir William's devilish neat thing. The anxiety of Jessie and Lethenard to get away from him and each other was impressive but obscure. Peter Botynor liked to understand things.

He had no difficulty in believing that Jessie Marner would be willing to amuse herself with Sir William. Sir William was even less likely to be shy of Jessie. He was a lusty old rascal, the girl was dainty and easy, she would be a pleasant diversion to the wooing of magnificence at Ashcombe. Nothing more natural than some dalliance. Why, then, if Lethenard caught him at it, he might be severe with the poor girl and she angry and ashamed. But why should Lethenard bother about her? His majesty was not to be suspected of any interest in country girls. A lonely fellow.

There was another question. How came Sir William to be dallying with any girl at Upper Humble? He must have turned off the plain high road on purpose. He would not ride miles out of his way to a tiny village for the chance of finding there a girl to amuse him. What did he want in Humble? Perhaps he had seen Jessie before and marked her down. He would not be scrupulous in his pleasures or merciful. Peter suspected many ugly purposes behind that jovial face. And yet if he had quartered himself at Ashcombe to ply his suit of Miss Lovel it was a queer folly to ride off on an intrigue with a village girl. And of folly Peter acquitted the man. Then what was he doing at Humble? Prying into something or somebody. There was no one to pry into except Mr. Botynor who had no secrets and Mr. Lethenard who was all secrets. Why, then, what if the old fellow had come to Cotswold, not for Miss Lovel, but for Jacobites? It would be a brilliant stroke to establish himself at Ashcombe where no one could meddle with him, whence he could watch everyone whilst he made sure that the great house and its wealth were not used for King James. And if he were a government spy he would have

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

an eye to Lethenard. So it would be in his vocation to come out to Humble and engage with somebody who could tell him about Lethenard, and who could be better than the rector's pretty daughter? No wonder Lethenard was furious when he caught them together. Behold an explanation of everything.

"Yes, I am very clever," said Peter. "I wonder if I am too clever? But I think I will say a word in Jessie's ear."

It was late, and the company had all gone home, when Sir William Zouch appeared before Miss Lovel. She remarked on this, she hoped that he was not tired by his long ride, knowing as well as he did that he could not have been so long going to Stow and back. The gentleman, who flattered himself that he knew her and her sex, said meekly that he had found the saddle hard upon him and was compelled to lie down and rest his leg when he came in. The lady gazed at his legs, which were displayed in silk stockings, "Faith, ma'am, they are not so light as they were," says the gentleman with a rueful chuckle. "Something monumental. But my good leech swears that they are sound at the core."

"Sir, I give you joy of them," says the lady languidly.

"You've had company, ma'am?"

"Have I? I wonder. Lord yes, there were two creatures or so. Sir, you should have been here to protect me."

"Your majesty don't need that," Sir William laughed.

She reflected. "I can't tell if that is a compliment or not. But I vow no man thinks it is."

"Then hear me swear," says Sir William dramatically. "I protest to God, she is the finest woman and the most delicious who don't know how to use her head."

The lady smiled.

> "She was a wight—if ever such wight were—
> To suckle fools and chronicle small beer,"

she said. "I thank you, sir."

"No, ma'am. That was said of a good woman, not a wise one."

"And I thank you again. Now Sir William speaks out. A good woman cannot be wise nor a wise one good." She

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

turned on her side, she was lying on a couch, put her chin on her hand and looked at him. "Oh, sir, how can you risk your virtue with me?"

"I have none to lose, ma'am," he smiled. "But you put into my mouth what I never said nor thought. If I praise your head it is not to abuse your heart."

"Oh, I suppose I should never lose that either?"

"Not till your head tells you you may. Well, ma'am, is that praise or no?"

"Sir, I believe most men would think not."

"And you are right. Most men love their women to be fools."

"But not Sir William Zouch. He still desires a wise one. Sir, it is kind in you to hope on. I fear you have had many disappointments."

"Why, ma'am, do I look a disappointed man."

She considered him. "No. But a little like a man who has tried everything."

"Prove all things: hold fast that which is good. It's scripture, ma'am."

She lay back smiling. "Faith, I am proving several things to-day. I have heard diverse gentlemen. The comic, the romantic, now the sage."

Sir William scowled dramatically. "'Sblood, she threatens me with rivals!" he laid his hand on his sword. "Ay, you spoke of two creatures before. And do you remember how they talked. Death and damnation for them. Who are they?" he took breath. "Pray, ma'am, is that the right key?"

"It's very well, sir. For a gentleman with a leg. Indeed, sir, there was a young Mr. Botynor who was comedy. And mysterious Mr. Lethenard who was romance. Both good in their own styles."

"I grind my teeth," said Sir William and grinned. "My Botynor! Bless his round face, that's my good Samaritan A pleasant child. Geoffrey Lethenard—well, God give you joy of him."

"I did not know that you knew Mr. Lethenard," says the lady with some curiosity. "I think he has not been here since you came."

"He has not," Sir William said.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"You are not friends? Pray, sir, do you know him well?"

"Why, ma'am, we have met. There was no great love between us, and it pleased heaven to decrease it on further acquaintance."

"I wonder why."

Sir William laughed. "No, madam, I thank you. I will say nothing against the gentleman. I don't want you to like him."

"You are frank, sir."

"Lord, there are no mysteries about me. I am an old fellow who wants to be comfortable, so wants his friends comfortable too, and would not have them go upon adventures."

She stirred. "Mr. Lethenard would be an adventure for me?"

Sir William's heavy eyes gleamed. "What, hasn't he told you so?"

"It is what all men tell me," says the placid voice.

"I believe not, ma'am. Our Lethenard is a romance: it's your own word for him. But we are not all so. Pray, has Miss Lovel any ambition to quarrel with the world?"

"Is that romance, sir? Faith, I thought romance was to right the wrong and fight at odds."

"And charge windmills. Don Quixote Lethenard. You think so? Well, I am not romantic, ma'am. I like to know what I'm doing."

Again the lady stirred. It was the echo of what she had said to Lethenard. But she did not tell him so.

"I don't want to turn the world upside down to set it right," he was saying. "I like the world I know."

"Pray, Sir William," says the placid voice, "do you believe in anything?"

"I believe in you, my dear," Sir William smiled.

"Oh, because you find it pleasant to look at me."

"Because you are a beautiful woman," Sir William corrected her. "Because you make me feel devilish much a man when I am near you. Because you have a fine great house and everything handsome about you. Because you're mighty rich. Yes, that's why, ma'am. And also because you're all sound and sweet. Egad, that's all I

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

believe in at the end of the day, hearty, kind living, what else is there? Tilting at windmills, Susan."

"Thou hast made him," said the placid voice, "a little lower than the angels."

It was then or thereabouts that the candles and Mr. Fettiplace came in.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER X

SIR WILLIAM IS IN THE WAY

RIDING to Ashcombe on the next day, Lethenard found the lady on the bowling-green with Sir William. He did not say what he thought, but his self-restraint was rather visible than adequate. He was invited to join in the game and would not. He chose to be a critic of the play and did what he could to make bad blood between the players. They remained calm. He had much praise for Sir William's restored agility and wished that the invalid was not too hardy in venturing on the strenuous game of bowls. It seemed to Mr. Lethenard something rash after so long a day in the saddle. But he hoped they would see Sir William again in Upper Humble before long. And then he laughed. "I suppose there's no doubt of that, eh, Zouch?" He turned to the lady. "Sir William has mighty good taste, ma'am. Pray, do you know the parson's pretty daughter?"

"All parsons have daughters," says the lady. "It is their vocation. What is yours, sir?"

"Ay, ay," Sir William stared amiably, "is that the girl that showed me the way? Your parson's daughter? You are lucky, Geoffrey."

"I suppose she showed you the way to Humble," says Lethenard.

"No, faith, to find the way out of your village, that's the trouble, Geoffrey," Sir William grinned.

"Egad, it did seem difficult," says Lethenard.

"Pray, Mr. Lethenard, bid them see that my coach is ready," the lady commanded. "Sir William and I are going to Bourton."

Sir William watched the gentleman's sullen back. "Are we, ma'am?" he grinned. "Now that's gracious."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Sir, Mr. Lethenard was tedious. Do not you be."

So Lethenard having made nothing of that, took horse again and rode to Sir Charles Monox. He arrived into a scene of domestic bliss. Sir Charles was in the park with his wife and his small son and a small pony. The boy, who was indeed far too young for it, was on the pony from which his short, plump legs stuck out straight on either side, and, throbbing delighted fear, he urged the pony on while his father followed near enough to save him from catastrophe, and my lady stood and watched with smiling pride.

None of them saw Lethenard come. He sat stiff and tall on his big horse, towering over them, waiting.

My lady turned. "Good God, Mr. Lethenard!" she cried. "Do you bring us bad news?"

"Not I. There is no news."

"Why, you looked so grim——" she laughed uncomfortably.

"I suppose I was jealous, my lady," Lethenard said. "This is mighty pretty."

My lady, who thought he was sneering, which was unjust, turned away to her son. Sir Charles, who thought it natural but impertinent that anybody should be jealous of him said, "My dear Geoffrey!"

"Go on, Charles. I'll not spoil sport. The heir of all the Monoxes is impatient. Don't make him hate me."

But the rest of that riding lesson did not go well, and soon a groom was leading the pony of a small boy, who tried valiantly not to cry, back to the house.

"Pray, sir, should I go too?" says my lady to her lord.

"I hope not," Lethenard put in quickly. "I have no secrets to talk. And, faith, of what I want to ask you, I believe my lady may be the best judge."

Lady Monox looked at him. "Sir, you are learning to flatter."

"I am awkward, my lady. I am not such a fool as to flatter you. Here is my question: How long shall we have Sir William Zouch among us?"

"Pray, sir, how can I judge of that?" says my lady.

"I suppose you know Miss Lovel's mind better than any of us."

"Sir, I believe Miss Lovel has no secrets from anyone."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"My God, she is all a secret to me," Lethenard laughed. "Well, my lady, what does she mean to do with Zouch? She must see that the fellow is healed, if ever he was hurt. He is as sound as I am. How long will she let him stay at Ashcombe?"

"Sir, I can't fancy Miss Lovel showing a guest the door unless he gave offence."

"It seems that he does not give offence. Would you say that the lady has a kindness for him?"

"I should think it an impertinence, Mr. Lethenard."

"Faith, so should I. Our Zouch is something mature. But she keeps him there at Ashcombe, and while he is there we are none of us safe."

My lady looked at him with dislike. "You are nervous, sir."

"I think not," Lethenard laughed and looked at her husband. "When is the Prince due in Cotswold, Charles?"

My lady was a little paler. "I believe you are right," said Sir Charles slowly. "Dr. King hopes to see him before the month is out."

"But if Zouch is still at Ashcombe he will come to ruin."

"Charles! That must not happen," my lady cried.

"So say we all, my lady," Lethenard smiled. "But how to stop it?"

"You must warn the Prince the country is not safe."

"Because Miss Lovel chooses to keep a spy in her house! Faith, that is a noble end to it all."

"That is not to be borne," Sir Charles cried.

"You cannot let the Prince come to us to be betrayed," says my lady eagerly.

"Madam, be sure that we shall not," Sir Charles frowned. "But come, Geoffrey, are you sure the man is here to spy?"

"Lord, you know what Zouch is."

"I don't forget. But it was yourself talked of him and Miss Lovel. I think it likely enough he is come to try his fortunes with her."

"Old Zouch!" said Lethenard with contempt. "No, Charles. He is at work already. I caught him yesterday in Humble. He had been nosing about in the village to find who had been coming to me. He was trying to cozen Jessie Marner, the parson's daughter, when I found him.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Oh, the girl's honest enough, but you know what she must know of our comings and goings and the muskets in the tithe barn. And with this old rake making love to her can you tell what she may let out? That's our Zouch. It's the parson's girl at Humble one day, it may be my lady's maid at Battle to-morrow. He prides himself on his hand with women. God knows how far he has gone with poor Jessie. That's our man, my lady. Can't you make Miss Lovel see him as he is?"

"Indeed, sir, Miss Lovel would not thank me for choosing her friends for her," says my lady coldly. "Or for telling tales of them."

"There is no question of telling tales, madam," Sir Charles cried. "The man is a known spy. But it is true, she is stubborn. I did say something about the fellow and she took it very ill. Faith, we must go further now. I think I will speak to Fettiplace."

"Pray do, sir," says my lady meekly, having no desire to speak to Miss Lovel.

So Sir Charles went to Ashcombe and there found Mr. Fettiplace reading Herodotus and very ready to talk about it. Some time was spent in arriving at the subject of Sir William Zouch. Then Mr. Fettiplace had no objection to talk about him. Sir William was still with them, a charming fellow! It was unfortunate that he should have gone riding. Sir Charles must stay and meet him. He was a man of wit and a neat scholar.

Sir Charles came to business. He had not come to meet Sir William Zouch. In fact, he was there (as a friend) to tell Mr. Fettiplace that the stay of Sir William Zouch at Ashcombe was making people talk. He saw that the man had imposed upon Mr. Fettiplace, who could not know his reputation. Sir William was no scholar, nor——

"My dear friend," Mr. Fettiplace interrupted eagerly, to prove that Sir William had a very pretty knowledge of the classics, not profound indeed, more in the French way than the English, but very elegant.

Sir Charles found this very hard to bear. "Sir, the man is a spy, a government spy," he broke in. "That is his living. He has had no other this five years, it's common knowledge. Bear me out, I warned you against him when

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

he came here. I must tell you, it's taken very ill that you harbour him. He is here to watch us, it's plain, and betray our plans."

Mr. Fettiplace put on dignity He was obliged to Sir Charles He did not know who had a right to take it ill that he chose his own guests. He had lived some while without hearing a suspicion of his discretion or his honour.

Sir Charles, who was not born for diplomacy, said what was wanted was not his honour but his knowledge of men.

Mr. Fettiplace quoted Greek about seeing the world and knowing the minds of men.

"Good God, sir," Sir Charles cried, "why should this London rake come down and lurk in Cotswold? He is about in the villages spying into our plans. He has been caught at it. And we are on the eve of our great venture. It's not to be borne."

"Sir, you are strangely deceived," says Mr. Fettiplace. "When the gentleman has gone out, which is but little, he has been with Miss Lovel."

Sir Charles lost his temper. "I suppose he doesn't take Miss Lovel with him when he goes corrupting the village girls."

"Pray, sir," Mr. Fettiplace stammered in his indignation, "pray sir, do you say anything against Miss Lovel?"

"Sir, I have the greatest honour for Miss Lovel," Sir Charles said quickly. "It's my wish to deter her from an unworthy——"

"Sir, I shall see to it that Miss Lovel is not annoyed by your wishes," Mr. Fettiplace said. "I conceive, sir, that we are not likely to understand each other. Sir, your servant."

And so Sir Charles rode away ineffectual. He had not gone more than a couple of miles before it dawned on him (he was naturally a just man) that he had been rather maladroit with Mr. Fettiplace. He turned his horse towards Upper Humble Lethenard was a resourceful fellow. Lethenard might see some way out of it.

Lethenard was in his farmyard making an inspection of his younger fighting cocks. He turned with a bird in

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

his hand. "What, Charles, you look as melancholy as the Blessed Martyr," he smiled. "Faith, you are more like him every day. Does your head feel loose at the neck?"

"I have been to Ashcombe," said Sir Charles solemnly.

"Is that it?" Lethenard put the bird down. Sir Charles dismounted and they walked away together. "So you did no good?"

"Harm, I believe," said Sir Charles, and told of his conversation with Mr. Fettiplace. "I managed badly enough. But there it is. Fettiplace will make it a point of honour to keep the fellow."

"And that's damnation," Lethenard whistled. "What the devil is this affection for Zouch? I swear to God, she's not the woman to fancy his old bones. D'ye think they are changing sides, Charles?"

"Simon Fettiplace? It is not to be thought of. The rascal has won upon him and they think him a pleasant fellow. And Fettiplace is the very man to take up a fellow who is ill thought of. He has always had a name for befriending broken rascals."

"Damn the old fool," said Lethenard heartily.

"What is to do? If Zouch stays we dare not bring the Prince here. We can do nothing. He will know any move we make before it is made."

"The end of all things—Will Zouch," Lethenard laughed. "I think not, Charles, I think not. If Zouch stays, let him stay and be damned to him."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a dangerous country, our Cotswold country. Lord, the good man had a fall when he came. He might have another fall, Charles. A fall that would stop his riding after pretty Jessie Marner. A bad fall, Charles. And the fellows that picked him up wouldn't take him to Ashcombe. I think it could be arranged. A cord across the road when the gentleman is in a hurry—and Will Zouch takes a real toss."

"It's an ugly trick, Lethenard," Sir Charles frowned.

"Do you know a pretty one to deal with a spy? The cur must take his kicks." Lethenard laughed. "Lord, I wish him no worse. He is nothing. Let him lie on his

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

back in a safe house for a month or two and he may go to the devil as he pleases."

And Sir Charles, gloomier than ever, confessed that there was no better plan.

"Let us see, then," Lethenard chuckled and went into details. There were many houses which could take Sir William in. Time and place of the fall must be matter of chance. The fellow's coming and going would have to be watched till he could be caught conveniently. Several men must be engaged. Lethenard undertook to find them. "Damme, Charles," says he, making an ugly face, "it always comes on me to arrange our affairs."

"It is because you have the best head of us all," Sir Charles said. "I know that, Geoffrey."

"I think no one else does," Lethenard laughed.

That night a shaggy fellow dropped over the wall into the orchard while Lethenard walked there smoking his pipe. The next day some vagabonds made a slovenly camp where the Buckle Street runs through the high woods. It was not strange enough to be talked about. Drovers coming and going for Welsh cattle and Welsh ponies often halted there. Lethenard rode out that way and seeing a rough young horse that took his eye got into talk.

He was long about the bargain, stars broke from the darkening sky, glow-worms glimmered green in the misty shadows before he came back, and one of the drovers was still with him. But near the village he found Jessie Marner on the road.

"Off with you," says he to the drover loudly. "I'll not have the colt. He is not worth your price, no, nor half. Go to the devil." And while the drover stood grumbling he rode on. "What, Jessie, is it you? You are loitering late, my girl. That's a naughty trick."

The girl looked up at him. "Why do you scold me?" she said unsteadily. "Why do you always scold me now?"

"Egad, I have no right," Lethenard laughed. "But it is too late for you, ma'am. Sweet Sir William will not be coming now. Or has he come and gone and madam is left lonely? A rogue, my girl, a sad fellow. I vow you'll have no good of him, Jessie."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The girl gave a cry and hurried on and Lethenard rode home smiling and frowning in the dark.

The drover stood watching her till she vanished. Then he came to Lethenard's house. The door stood ajar.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XI

SIR WILLIAM IS OUT OF THE WAY

IT was a little later that Peter Botynor, acting under the orders of conscience, went to see his sister. He went in fear, for though he could, and proposed to, boast that he had approached Susan Lovel, he felt it likely that Dorcas would complain of a lack of enterprise. But the desire of Dorcas that he should not leave her to Charles Monox and his conspiracies was affecting, and about those conspirators Peter was not at his ease. If Zouch was on the track of them, and Zouch had been hovering about Lethenard's village again, there would be trouble for somebody: and if anyone got into trouble Charles Monox would not escape. He was that kind of man.

My lady sat in her garden embroidering a coat for her son, who was driving a gardener mad. "I admire the energies of the Monoxes, Dorcas," Peter said. "I always did."

My lady distributed an affectionate smile between him and her son. "I often think he has something of you, Peter."

"Good heavens, no. I was a still and peaceful child. They used to say it took me an hour to turn round."

"Little Charles is so persistent," his mother beamed.

"And so is big Charles. A most persistent creature. A very spider. But not me. I never had ambitions. By the way, how is the larger Charles?"

"Why do you say spider?" says she coldly.

"Because of all the webs he weaves, my dear."

"It is not kind. It is not very like you to sneer at Charles."

"Faith, it is like me to laugh at any fellow who takes himself seriously."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Because nothing is serious to you."

"Oh, my Dorcas! You are. But what is happening? It is not possible we should quarrel. And I came full of virtue."

Lady Monox studied him with an air of innocent wisdom which he found very engaging. "Do you know, Peter, I sometimes think you are jealous of Charles."

"Of course I am. He married my sister."

My lady smiled. "You are a dear boy, Peter."

"And a Christian spirit, ma'am. I forgive him—as a rule. Indeed I came to do him a service. Pray, has it entered his head that this fellow Zouch at Ashcombe may be a spy?"

He expected some alarm: at least some surprise: he was disappointed. "My dear, they are sure of it," says my lady complacently.

Peter stared at her. "Faith, you're not breaking your heart about it."

"Charles says they can do nothing while Sir William is at Ashcombe."

Peter smiled at her and met innocent eyes. "And Dorcas is praying that his days may be long in the land."

"Have you been to Ashcombe, Peter?"

"I have been. I have seen. And yet live."

"Well, sir, and is she not all I said?"

"Even more."

My lady laughed. "Oh, Peter, when were you shy before?"

"It is true," Mr. Botynor said, for his round and ruddy face was flushing, "you make me feel like a little boy. You don't lose the knack of it, Dorcas."

"And did she?" my lady smiled.

"Perhaps she did. At least I ran away."

"Oh, fie!" says my lady, still amused. "I think that must have been very interesting to her, Peter. She is not used to see men run from her."

It surprised Mr. Botynor to find that his sister took it so well. As he rode slowly home he discovered that he had hoped Dorcas would be annoyed with him. He could not account for this. But he was surprised at Dorcas. He had seldom found her sisterly benignity so

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

disconcerting. He began to wonder what Dorcas really thought about him.

Before he came to Prior's Humble he was startled out of these meditations. His bailiff met him in the red field and told him that Jessie Marner was lost.

Peter said "Lost?"

"Her be gone, Mr. Botynor, and what have come to she no man knoweth."

On the evening before (to cut the bailiff short, who was a man of phrases) Jessie Marner went out of Humble rectory. She would often do so. She told no one where she was going. Neither her father nor his housekeeper, who had been her nurse, remarked anything strange in her. Thereafter some of the village folk saw her by the copse above the mill pond. And that was not strange either. She was then walking alone. No one could guess which way she went. She did not come back to the rectory. Men had been into Stow, into Moreton for news of her. She had not been seen on any road. All the village was out searching. They had found nothing.

"Mr. Botynor," said the bailiff solemnly, "'tis as if her had walked out of the world. 'Tis like the man Enoch in scripture: her was not for God hath taken she."

"God?" said Peter.

He stared up the valley as though it were strange country. Through the wood above him men were working like beaters. He set his horse going and rode on to the rectory.

Jessie Marner's father was sitting before a folio of the patriarch Photius. He put a cold hand on Peter's and looked at him dully. While Peter spoke he bent over his book and followed a line with his finger. He had nothing to say.

Peter rode out of the village making for the hillside above the mill where Jessie had last been seen. By the mill pond there was a little crowd, Lethenard among them giving orders.

"Ha, Peter," Lethenard called. "Any news?"

"Nothing. Do you think she is in the pond?"

"It is a chance," Lethenard got the men to work in the gathering dusk and the pond was dragged again and again, but the turbid water gave up nothing human.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Well. She is not there," Lethenard panted. He had been hauling with the men. "Let be. There's ale for you at the house, my men. We can do no more to-night." He put on his coat and turned to Peter. "I'm damned if I know what we shall do in the morning," he said in a lower voice. "Do you? What the devil has the girl done with herself?"

Peter walked beside him a little way. "Is Zouch still at Ashcombe?" he said.

"What?" Lethenard looked at him keenly. "What puts Zouch in your head?"

"I suppose Jessie knew something of what's in hand."

"Something!" Lethenard shrugged. "A clever girl in Humble is likely to know something. And Jessie is no fool."

"I wonder if Zouch has found that out."

"You have seen them together, have you? Lord, I believe half the county has seen them. Do you think he has carried her off. But he is still at Ashcombe, Peter. He can't have her there."

"No, not there," Peter said.

"You are shrewd. But damme, you are too hard on Jessie. I don't believe she would sell us. She might like to play with the old rake. She did like her little pleasures. But I'll swear she wouldn't play foul."

"I haven't said so, Lethenard. I never thought so."

"What, you mean he has kidnapped her?"

"I suppose it could be. Lord, we are guessing in the dark."

"In the dark," Lethenard repeated. "Well, to-morrow is another day."

But on the next day while Peter was trudging up and down that hillside seeking any sign of how she had gone from the only place in which she had been seen, a lad called to him from the mill. "Mr. Botynor, Mr. Botynor, they ha' found she. Yes, surely, Farmer Tea's woodman he hath found she in the old withy bed under the wold, a dead woman."

Peter strode out. Away to the westward, beneath the bare long curves of the hilltops one of the rivulets which

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

fed the hilltops had its source in a patch of spongy ground in a hollow. There was the osier bed of the wold farm, dense with its summer growth, a little lonely thicket hidden till a man was close upon it.

But a dozen men were there when Peter came, and in the midst of them lay Jessie Marner. Her sodden dress sank close upon her body. Her black hair was loose and clotted with brown mud. Uglier stains than mud marred her face and neck, purple bruises and wounds. A handkerchief was thrust into her torn mouth.

"Her be a murdered woman, Mr. Botynor," said Farmer Tea. "'Tis a wicked, bloody deed surely."

Peter looked down at her, looked long.

"Aye, aye," says Farmer Tea," it went cruel and hard for she, poor wench. And her a kind girl all her days. He was a bloody-minded man did serve her so, Mr. Botynor. I do reckon the good Lord won't forget it to he. I wish I had my old hands to his neck, I reckon I'd show he a crick in hisn." There was a growl of approval from his men.

"Well! She must not lie here, Billy," Peter said. "Send your lads for a hurdle and a cloak."

"They be gone to the village this long while. They'm telling parson, I reckon."

"Telling him!" Peter echoed. "God have mercy!"

Farmer Tea shook his head. "I don't say it, Mr. Botynor. No, sir. 'Tis vengeance the good Lord be thinking of this morning. And so be I."

Peter knelt down by the head and looked close.

"Tell me now, Mr. Botynor, who do you put it on?" the farmer said eagerly.

Peter did not answer. His face was paler as he studied the marks on that cold head.

Men were coming up the hill, Lethenard riding ahead. He flung himself off his horse and thrust through the little crowd; with his hand on Peter's shoulder, he too bent over the body. "Dead, Peter?"

"Dead as dust."

Lethenard knelt too. "So that was the way of it," he muttered. "A brutal business. That blow on her head and hands at her throat. What's this?" He

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

touched the handkerchief in her mouth; he drew it out. It was silk, a fine gentleman's handkerchief; it was embroidered in the corner with the initials W. Z. He held it out to Peter.

"I know," Peter said. "I saw it."

Lethenard swore under his breath cold, furious oaths. "Jessie! Little Jessie," he said in a broken voice. He flung the handkerchief down on the body; he started up and looked wildly round him. "Who found her? You? Where was she?" The woodman pointed out the place. "Aye, thrust deep into the osiers. She might have been there till she rotted. It's lonely enough."

"None so lonely neither, master," says Farmer Tea. "There be the Tewkesbury road beyond the hill."

"The Tewkesbury road!" Lethenard looked at Peter. For by that a man would come to Humble from Ashcombe who chose to keep to the roads.

They had brought the bier from Humble church; they laid the dead girl on it and carried her to her father's house.

Lethenard and Peter walked behind her some way in silence till Lethenard broke out, "By God, you were right, Peter." Peter stared at him. "Don't you remember, you said, is Zouch still at Ashcombe. But I never thought he was the man for this. The man!" he laughed. "I knew Jessie would never play foul. But if I had guessed it might end so!" He swore at Zouch again.

"Who could guess this," said Peter drearily.

"Oh, the dog is foul enough. What can come of a spy but dirt?"

The next day the coroner came out from Stow and summoned his jury to the miller's barn. They heard it sworn that Jessie Marner had been held down and killed by blows on the head while a handkerchief in her mouth kept her silent, that the handkerchief was a gentleman's and bore the initials W. Z., that she had been seen once, twice, and again talking with Sir William Zouch, that on the night of the murder Sir William Zouch had been on the Tewkesbury road near the osier bed in which her body was hidden. The coroner told them it was not to be doubted the poor maiden had died defending her

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

honour against some brutal man. They found that she had been murdered by Sir William Zouch, knight, and the coroner made out his warrant.

That night four men came in a chaise to Ashcombe Manor and asked for Sir William Zouch and showed him the gilt and painted staves of the constables of Bourton, and arrested him for the murder of Jessie Marner. He was not pleased. He asked who the devil Jessie Marner was. He asked for their warrant. He swore it was a plot, and a damned silly plot. He called Mr. Fettiplace.

The four constables held up their staves at the old gentleman, who was much shocked. "My good fellows, my good fellows!" he gasped and looked sad reproaches at Sir William. "Sir, this is unworthy."

"Damme, sir, don't play the fool. I am not in the humour for it. Are you in this, too, Mr. Fettiplace?"

It was some time before Mr. Fettiplace could be made to understand that the constables were not there for him, not come to Sir William's order, and in the explanation Sir William was not happy. He swore that it was a plot against him, and he did not know who was in it, but whoever they were—let Mr. Fettiplace remember—they should pay damnably.

"My dear sir, I am bewildered," says Mr. Fettiplace. "Pray, what is the plot?"

"Damme, sir, I do nothing but tell you. They put it on me that some village wench is murdered. A cursed trick, sir."

"Ecod, you do talk pretty," says one of the constables, "but 'tis no trick her be dead."

"Who is it, sir?" Mr. Fettiplace quavered.

"How the devil do I know?"

The constable cried out, "Well, you do know, and knew she too well. 'Tis Parson Marner's daughter, Mr. Fettiplace, and her had cruel wrong. Come your ways now, master, you ha' talked too much."

"Where do you want to take me, you rogues?"

"Aye, there's pretty lodging for 'e in Bourton. Come your ways." They laid hands on him again.

Sir William called Mr. Fettiplace to witness how they treated him, and swore they should pay for it.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Sir, sir, what can I do?" Mr. Fettiplace quavered. "The men are in their duty."

"I'll thank you to send a letter for me," Sir William frowned at him. "I'll promise you, you'll be wise."

"No no, no writing here," the constable said. "If so be you want to write you write at Bourton and us'll take it to Squire Izod. Them's our orders."

"Egad, you have it all planned," says Sir William with a loud laugh. "Let's on with it, then. Your servant, Mr. Fettiplace, damme, your obliged servant."

Mr. Fettiplace fluttered out after him, watched him driven off into the night, and a much agitated old gentleman sought Susan.

She was in her private parlour talking to her maid, rather, letting Kitty talk to her. She waved the girl away. "Well, sir?" she said.

"My dear, the constables have taken Sir William. It is said he has done murder." Mr. Fettiplace sank shrunken into a chair.

"And what does he say?" the placid voice asked.

"He says it is a plot, a plot against him. He is very angry."

"One would be angry," said the placid voice. "Pray, sir, what did he say of her?"

"Her?"

"The woman who is murdered."

"Indeed I don't know." Mr. Fettiplace put his hand to his head. "He seemed not to think of her."

"She was beaten to death," the placid voice fell lower. "Pray, sir, did he know her?"

"I can't tell. He made nothing of her."

Susan Lovel stirred. "I am cold," she said.

In the morning Sir William was brought into court at Stow and Squire Izod and his brother justices heard the evidence that he had sought Jessie out in Humble, been with her often, been on the road near the osier bed on the night of the murder, that his handkerchief was in her mouth. Sir William was sharp and shrewd with the witnesses but did not shake them. He declared the evidence a plot to make away with him, and was asked why

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

there should be a plot against him and who should make it. He told the justices they knew more of that than he, and was roared down. He demanded delay and bail and was packed off to Gloucester gaol to stand his trial at the assizes.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XII

EMOTIONS OF MR. BOTYNOR

PETER BOTYNOR found the world uncomfortable. It was a new and startling experience. Jessie Marner alive had never been much in his head, she was a pretty girl to kiss in passing : Jessie Marner dead disturbed him. He did not like the people in his world to suffer. He felt vaguely guilty. It was very plain that nothing which he had done had harmed her, nothing he might have done would have saved her. But the irrational suspicion that he was to blame abode in him.

The exultation of the good people of Cotswold in the catching of Zouch did not help Mr. Botynor. It confused his mind still further. With the plight of Sir William Zouch he had no sympathy. The fellow was patently a rascal. That he had planted himself in the guileless household of Ashcombe as a spy, that he had tried to use Jessie Marner in his dirty work, was not to be doubted. If he went to the gallows, he had himself to blame. And indeed the evidence was good enough to hang him. Peter's mind found nothing in it to challenge. That Zouch might have pushed Jessie further than she chose to go, found her dangerous, and murdered her in disappointed lust, or fear—it was likely enough. But Mr. Botynor was uneasy.

It was all so convenient.

Zouch was spoiling sport. Half the gentlemen in Cotswold wished him out of the way. He might have found out enough to hang some of them. He certainly would if he stayed. And here was a charge which put him out of action for ever. Even if the government got him out of Gloucester gaol, he could be no more use against the gentlemen of Cotswold. It was mighty convenient for them.

But then, if the thing was a plot, as Zouch declared, some

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

other scoundrel murdered Jessie Marner and was going free. Why, the girl might have been hammered to death in order to make a case against Zouch. Peter shrugged. Like Susan Lovel, he felt cold. He was not able to believe the truth as diabolical as that. After all, if there was a plot, it was a plot of his own kinsfolk, his own friends. Fantastic creatures to be sure, some of them not too nice, most of them hard riders—but not treacherous, not cruel. Charles Monox—impossible to think the good Charles would do a dirty thing. Lethenard—a wild fellow and hard enough, too reckless for cunning. Old Izod, the shrewdest head of them all—he would not care what he did if he saw his way, he would never play so deep. One and all, Peter could believe them ready to take what chance gave them. Even the good Charles! The fellows on the other side were apt to be devils to Charles. Whatever happened was very well to Charles if it served his divine cause. Since the girl was murdered, poor girl, why Charles would be apt to think that Zouch had murdered her. It was damnably convenient.

But the evidence! The fellows who swore that they had seen Zouch were honest enough. The handkerchief—Peter's own eyes saw the handkerchief in the dead mouth. He told himself that he was a fool for his doubts and was still uncomforted.

He wondered what they made of it at Ashcombe. The great Miss Lovel must have had some kindness for Zouch, she kept him so long. How would she take his downfall? And Dorcas too. She had been very well content that the man should stay in Cotswold and keep the good Charles from venturing anything. Dorcas could not like the way things had gone.

Mr. Botynor took horse and went to see his sister.

Some one else was before him. A coach, emblazoned with silver chevrons and a gold crescent, stood at the door of Battle Manor. Mr. Botynor whistled.

When Susan Lovel was brought into my lady's parlour she found Sir Charles with his wife. She paused, she made the gentleman so grand a curtsey that, Miss Lovel being in herself impressive, it was of a condescension more than human. The bow of Sir Charles Monox was very good too. But his lady said, "Susan, my dear child," and

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

standing on tiptoe kissed both her cheeks and patted her.

Sir Charles, on consideration, pronounced that no one was more welcome than Miss Lovel. She looked at him over his lady's head. "Sir, you encourage me," she said. He hoped that Mr. Fettiplace was well.

"Yes, sir, I thank you. You are kind to remember him." Each waited for the other to say something else. The inspiration came to Sir Charles. He asked Miss Lovel's pardon. My lady must persuade her to stay till he could have the honour of her company. At the moment he had affairs waiting on him. He bowed himself out.

"I am in disgrace, Dorcas," said Miss Lovel sadly.

"Fie, you are a rogue. Charles was doing his best to be friends. But you always try to make him uncomfortable."

"Who, I?" says Miss Lovel with round eyes. "I would not dare. But can a woman do it, Dorcas?"

"Sit down," said Lady Monox. "You are much too big, child," and made her sit on the couch and sat beside her and smiled at the way she disposed herself. It was the habit of Miss Lovel to combine ease and decoration. "Do you know you have not come to me for years?"

"And you, my dear?" Miss Lovel looked at her. "I believe you were only at Ashcombe once while the man Zouch was there. Well, it seems you were right."

The smooth brow of Lady Monox was lightly furrowed. "It's all very difficult, child," she said. "Indeed, Charles never liked the fellow."

"Indeed, I think he mentioned it," said Miss Lovel. "The wise Charles. Pray, Dorcas, are we to be forgiven?"

"You are not to be absurd," said my lady.

"Why, I make a mock of it because it plagues me."

Lady Monox looked at her. "Fie, child, you are too conscious. You go for nothing in this. Do not think of it."

"A large nothing. If I had not kept the fellow at Ashcombe the girl would still be alive. I think of that, Dorcas."

Lady Monox made occasion to touch her. "My dear! But that's not fair, that's wrong. How could you know?"

"Faith, I was warned enough!" Susan laughed. "Ask the wise Charles."

Lady Monox sat very still. "My dear, Charles thought

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

the man a spy. That was why he wanted you to be rid of him. He had no notion of such a thing as this."

"A spy is he?" Susan said. "Watching at Ashcombe for Jacobites. Oh, I am much obliged to him. Yes, I see now——"

"What, child?" says my lady eagerly.

"Why, the fellow had grown fond of riding alone. I wondered sometimes. I suppose he was seeking traces of your Jacobite plans. And in this pretty work he came on the parson's daughter. Faith, I have been a good friend to you all, Dorcas."

"Ah, don't talk so!" my lady cried.

"And to the girl who is dead," said Susan.

"My dear, this is out of all reason," my lady was decisive. "The man has always passed for a gentleman. He goes everywhere. He would be careful to show his best to you. You are not to blame that——"

"I will make oath that Miss Lovel is not to blame," said Peter and shut the door behind him. He had the satisfaction of seeing Miss Lovel blush from her face to her bosom: an exquisite work of nature.

"La, sir, are you here?" says his sister, smiling. "That's rare and strange."

"Mr. Botynor is very rare indeed," says Miss Lovel "I doubt if he exists. He is like the unicorn."

"No, m'am. Not the unicorn. The lion. A champion of virgins. I am here to defend you. Who dares blame Miss Lovel, Dorcas?"

"A lion? I did not know it was a shy beast."

"The lion walks alone, madam. But come, what have I to do here. Who assails Miss Lovel?"

"Why, Miss Lovel does," my lady said quickly. "She blames herself for harbouring this man Zouch. What do you say, Peter?"

"Miss Lovel is too virtuous," Peter shook his head. "It's the fault of her sex. When anything goes wrong there is always a woman to say it was her fault." He turned to Susan. "You are presumptuous, ma'am. You are not so important as you suppose. Who brought Zouch to you? Who established him in your house? It was I."

"Dear sir," says Miss Lovel with a certain enthusiasm,

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I do not doubt your innocence. Who could? But I dare not think myself so innocent as you. I should have known the fellow."

"To be sure, I thought I did. At least, I never believed in his damaged leg."

"Marvellous," says Miss Lovel. "But you have waited long to tell me so."

"Pray, m'am, did you need telling?"

Miss Lovel turned to Lady Monox. "Look, he was to be my champion and now he wounds me."

"He is a kind creature," says my lady. "He will never speak out. What did you think of the man, Peter?"

"I thought he came to Ashcombe to woo Miss Lovel. Didn't you, ma'am?"

Miss Lovel put back her head and looked at Peter under drooping eyelids. "Sir, do you think so still?" she said coldly.

"Faith, I began to doubt it some time ago."

"What disturbed the complacency of Mr. Botynor?" the placid voice inquired.

"To find him loitering about Humble and Jessie Marner."

My lady cried out, "You saw him too, Peter?"

"Faith, it seems that all Cotswold saw him." Peter looked at her with some surprise.

"Mr. Botynor did not tell me," says the placid voice.

"What should I have told you, madam?" Peter cried.

"Oh sir, it's no matter, I had friends who did. The more blame to me who would not mark them. Conceive it, Mr. Botynor, I am sorry this man stayed in my house to do a murder. I am so delicate. But I beg your pardon. I trouble you with other people's affairs." She turned to my lady; she began an affectionate conversation about my lady's small son; she demanded to be taken to the nursery. They went out with arms round each other's waist. In the doorway, to be sure, my lady broke step and turned her head and "Won't you come, Peter?" said she. But Mr. Botynor saw that he was not required.

Left alone in the parlour, he took the easiest chair (the ideals of his sister in furniture always seemed to him inadequate) and considered the nature of woman. He felt that his knowledge of the subject was defective. That Miss

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Lovel would be convinced of the guilt of the wretched Zouch was not what he had expected of her. "Call you this backing of your friends," he murmured. "After all, the fellow was your friend, madam. You are fickle. But, faith, I should have thought you more likely to stand by a man because every one turned against him. Miss Lovel against the world. Sure, ma'am, that's the part to suit your temper. But you are only a fair-weather friend—

Souvent femme varie
Bien fol qui s'y fie."

And then, for he had a just mind, it occurred to him that there might be another way of taking the lady. She was perhaps not changeable, but loyal: loyal to the woman who had suffered. Men were apt to be on a woman's side against womankind. Once in a lifetime a woman might be found who ranged herself with women. Perhaps the great Miss Lovel was that one. It seemed unlikely. The lady showed no fondness for the company of her sex. But, give her her due, what inflamed her was not that the fellow had stayed with her and run after another woman, not that he had brought her into an ugly story, but that a woman had been killed. A simple human rage. Who would have thought it of her imperial nature? No, but she was better than that. Her wrath was not with the wretched Zouch but herself. She was to blame for all.

"The devil's in it," said Mr. Botynor. "I begin to like the creature. But she is not judicious. She don't ask herself if Zouch really did it. There are certainly disadvantages in being a woman."

Sir Charles Monox opened the door. "What, Peter?" he said. "All alone?"

Peter gazed at him heavily and repeated his thought aloud. "There are certainly disadvantages in being a woman, Charles. That is why I am alone."

"My dear fellow," Sir Charles smiled indulgently, "I have no notion what you mean."

"Well, they are gone to worship a child. That is one of the disadvantages of being a woman. You will forgive them, for it is your child. A fond and foolish reason, Charles."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"You have seen Miss Lovel?"

"Yes. We agreed that we are both to blame."

"To blame?" Sir Charles echoed.

"For the murder of Jessie Marner."

Sir Charles frowned at him. "I suppose you are not serious: I don't care for the joke, Peter."

"Faith, if you see one, it's your own making. And that's not likely neither."

"My dear Peter!" Sir Charles was startled by a certain bitterness in his tone. "It seems we don't understand each other. How you can be to blame for the poor girl's death is beyond my guessing."

"Well, who is, Charles?"

"Good God, there can be no doubt. It is this rascal Zouch. Why, the case was proved in court. But there's even more than you know. When they searched his room as Ashcombe they found a letter from the poor girl asking him to come to her."

"The devil they did!" Peter said. "And that is curious. Well, be it so. If Zouch had never come to Ashcombe, Jessie would not have been murdered. I agree."

"It's too plain." Sir Charles shook his head and sighed. "Poor girl."

"I agree," Peter repeated with a grim little laugh. "And what brought him to Ashcombe? It was I. Who harboured him at Ashcombe? It was Miss Lovel. Do you wonder we feel guilty?"

Sir Charles put a paternal hand on his shoulder. "My dear boy, no one blames you."

"Now that's very kind."

"Oh, think no more of it."

Peter looked at him steadily. "But I knew Jessie," he said. "By the way, what was that about a letter Zouch had from her? Who brought it to Ashcombe?"

"Good Gad, how should I know?" Sir Charles cried.

"But somebody did. Or how did it get there? If I were you I should find out who it was."

"If you were me?" Sir Charles stared. "What have I to do with it? I'll not meddle, I thank you. It is not for me to gather evidence against the villain." His handsome

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

face expressed disgust. "There is something more than enough."

A joyful noise disturbed them. The heir of the house of Monox was trotting along the terrace emitting squeals and gurgles. For he was pursued. After him came Susan Lovel. Though the gentleman had the dignity of breeches and she was condemned by her sex to a hoop, she gained, and he was in delicious terror. The lady made no hurry; she glided like a bird on the water; she came upon him and surrounded him. From where he was engulfed in her petticoats invisible arose cries of war.

"This fellow," says the lady sadly, "is a mighty strong fellow. Oh what shall I do? He will destroy me. Sir, sir, it is you who win. I surrender. I will be good."

A flushed exultant gentleman emerged from her. She sank, waves of gold and blue, upon her knees, and put her hands together entreating mercy. The gentleman surveyed her haughtily. "Are you sorry you was bad?" he demanded. "Truly sorry?"

"Sir, I am always sorry, but I am always bad. What shall I do?"

"You shall give me a wide," said the gentleman.

She rose, she caught him up and set him on her shoulder and swept off with him, one arm holding him safe, her body swaying in easy grace. It seemed to Mr. Botynor that he had never seen a woman look so noble. He suffered from surprise. He had not thought Miss Lovel would ever look like that.

"The child forgets himself," said Sir Charles, moving to the door. "He is too easily excited."

"I wonder, does he get that from your family or mine," said Mr. Botynor.

They went out and found Lady Monox holding out her arms to her son, who had his arm round Miss Lovel's neck and would not come down.

"The gentleman has chosen me, Dorcas," says she. "Alas, poor mother, it had to come some day. Pray give us your blessing."

"You are two rogues." My lady smiled. "I intend a better match for him, Miss Lovel."

"Fie, sir, do you hear that?" Miss Lovel looked up at

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

the gentleman. "She means to part us. Come, I must carry you off." And she fled with him to her coach. But the gentleman thought that was going too far and struggled and flung himself from her and was hardly caught to her bosom. "My dear!" says she, kissing him. "What a terrible strong fellow! I am afraid of you."

"You are not!" says he between doubt and hope. "Are you truly?"

"Faith, I believe I am," said Miss Lovel. She looked at him and kissed his mother. She made the gentlemen a curtsey and mounted her coach.

"A wild creature," says Sir Charles.

Mr. Botynor felt a great desire to go and extricated himself from his sister rather curtly.

As he rode homeward up the valley he found that Susan Lovel had grown in favour with him. It was charming of the creature to be so womanly a woman: a condescension, to be sure, an act of grace, she made that plain, but she did it in a free hearty way as if she liked it. "Fie," says Peter to himself, "do you make so much of seeing a handsome young woman carry a child? You are a fool, sir. She is not the first. The thing has been done. In the beginning God made them female. It is but nature. I suppose you did not think her body feels to her like a man's."

But then his equable mind remarked that it was not her play with the boy, not the sight of that admirable body poised to the child's weight, not her kindness which delighted him, but her wrath. "Faith, I love her for scolding me," he pronounced. "She is a girl after my own heart. A girl of a fair mind. A girl of sense."

For it seemed to Mr. Botynor that his friends were taking the death of Jessie Marner with deplorable levity. Only Miss Lovel and he in all Cotswold kept their heads. It was confusion of mind to be delighted that Zouch was caught and rage against him. What was required was rage that the murder had been done and searching of soul how it came to be done.

Well! He was ready to do his part. The more ready after his conference with Charles. Mr. Botynor had never concealed from himself that he thought his majestic brother-in-law something of an ass. Yet the good Charles surprised

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

him. It ought to make an honest man wary that his enemy was accused of crime just when that enemy was most inconvenient. One would look close at the evidence. So Peter Botynor argued, expecting with the common folly of mankind others to think as he thought. And certainly the good Charles was very cavalier with the evidence.

That letter! It was damning, to be sure, a letter which linked Zouch with Jessie Marner and the place of her murder. It was worth thinking about, and the more Peter thought about it the less he liked it. How the devil did it get to Ashcombe? Jessie Marner would not have taken it herself. She would have drawn some attention, poor girl, leaving a letter at the manor for Sir William Zouch. Who was her postman? Somebody must have taken it, somebody must have known she was writing. And with all the countryside calling for vengeance that somebody did not appear. A wonderful, incredible somebody. How did the letter get to Ashcombe? It was not found on Zouch. It was only found among his traps when he was in prison. A mighty convenient way of getting evidence.

Convenient again! The whole affair was too devilish convenient.

Well, but the girl might have thrust a letter on Zouch some day when he was out riding. No very likely thing! She meets him on the road, by chance or design, she has a letter ready to make an assignation and the gentleman lays it up among his papers. Oh, it might be—but you would call it queer. At least the letter must be in Jessie's hand. She wrote it for some one. If not for Zouch, for whom then? The girl was something easy, but she was not talked of with any man. For that matter, there was no gossip of her and Zouch till she lay dead.

Suppose it was not Zouch who killed her. Then there must have been another man who wanted her dead. A man who had the chance of putting a letter in Zouch's baggage.

"My God, I should like to see that letter," said Mr. Botynor. But in fact he never did.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XIII

MISS LOVEL SEES THE VALE

SUSAN LOVEL woke to a day of summer heat. When she looked from the window the air was heavy and still as though the light which filled it held it down, the grass glistened and sparkled like a land of jewels, trees stood dark and solid against the sunshine. But her world was diminished. It had no height. Where the ground rose to the hills it was lost in mist, shimmering, shapeless.

When her maid came, pale and heavy with sleep, Miss Lovel was already in her habit. "La, my lady." Kitty blinked at her. "I felt as if I should never wake up this morning."

"So do I still, child. This morning and all the mornings. Tell them I want the chestnut mare."

"Oh ma'am, you'll not be alone?"

"But that is what I go out for," said the placid voice. "My dear, I think you are making me wait." Kitty fled. She thought sometimes that she did not understand her mistress. But it was very seldom. She had little to complain of in Miss Lovel.

The chestnut mare also thought it a day for riding. She was allowed to do as she chose. She bore her lady away over the smooth slopes of the park merrily, settled down to an easy gallop and was loath to check when she found a long hill against her. But if my lady had a day's work for her, she was ready, she was reasonable. They climbed and climbed.

The mist was about them, cool and wet on Susan Lovel's cheek, hiding the rest of the world, but thinner each mile. A white circle gleamed in the grey sky, a shaft of light pierced down and broke on the shoulder of a hill. It stood a moment like a rock rising from a silvery sea, then the mist

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

ebbed away and the hills came out vague, but revealed long slopes, bold ridges, rounded summits. She rode slowly, looking all about her. She could not see far, though she was riding on high ground : on every side the crests and shoulders of the hills shut her in : the hills went on for ever. And then on a sudden they vanished. She was at the edge of the world looking away into empty space, an infinite where there was nothing but misty light.

She stopped her horse, she gazed out into that void, and as she watched saw in it the gleam of water, dark masses took form, woods and clustered houses far and far below. For a long time she sat there looking down : then heard a church bell out of the distance, deep, single notes. She shivered and turned her horse and rode fast away.

As she came along the stony track of the Buckle Street, she caught up a man who drew aside to give her the best going, and touched his hat.

" Mr. Lethenard does not speak to me ? "

" Mr. Lethenard is in disgrace."

" It is fair to remind me." She bent her head. " Sir, I ask your pardon. I see that you meant to serve me if I would have let you."

" You are too generous, madam." Lethenard bowed. " I was trying to serve you but I went about it so clumsily that I did you a wrong."

" I don't know that, sir. You did as you could. And I chose the wrong side."

" Yes. I compelled you to it. Pray, ma'am, let us forget it."

" It is not easy to forget, sir. That girl is dead."

" My God, you are not to blame," Lethenard cried. " Blame me if you blame anyone. There was none but me could have saved her."

" You ? " says the lady.

" Yes, ma'am, I. Because I knew he was hunting her. And I went the wrong way to stop him. I should have called the dog out and shot him. I wish to God I had. But I thought I could shame him out of it—and the girl's dead."

The lady looked at him. " You knew her well, Mr. Lethenard ? "

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Why, she was always there in the village. She was part of the place. I had seen her grow from a baby to a woman. A little light thing," he shrugged. "She would always have a smile for you. Egad, ma'am, I talk like a father who has lost a child. I promise you, it's not in my way."

"You are forgiven, sir," she said gently: and they went on in silence . . .

"Miss Lovel has ridden far this morning?"

"Oh, to the end of the world—your world."

"Which is that, ma'am?"

"Why, the hills. Mr. Lethenard is a man of Cotswold, is he not? Faith, I have met no one here who has more of these brown hills in his blood."

Lethenard stared. "I believe I don't thank you for that. Are you mocking me? It's a jolly, simpleton's country, all mutton and ale."

"You think so?" said the placid voice. "Well, sir, who do you choose then? Who is a true son of the soil? Who is your man of Cotswold?"

"Lord, you have seen enough of them! Is there not one takes Miss Lovel's fancy?" Lethenard laughed. "Well, what do you say to Peter Botynor?"

"Mr. Botynor?" says she in some surprise. "Oh, sir, a calm gentleman. He will never do for your hills. He is a child of the comic muse."

"And whose son am I, madam?"

"Sure, sir, you must know you are romantic," says the placid voice. "A creature of the unknown, of mystery, of adventures. If I remember, you told me so. The hills are in your blood."

"I vow I never told you there was any mystery in me," said Lethenard sharply. "I am a poor man who wants to do something with his life, and——"

"And if it be a sin to covet honour Mr. Lethenard is the most offending soul alive. Will that do for you, sir?"

"Very well; I thank your ladyship."

"So Mr. Lethenard is set on great adventures. Forward into the unknown."

"Lead on, my lady."

"Oh, I! But I like to see. And indeed I like to see far."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"But into the unknown you must go. Miss Lovel is still a maid."

Miss Lovel's cheeks were pink with riding, but no whit the pinker for Mr. Lethenard. "Sir, I thank you for your confidence," says she.

"And she is not ready for the greatest adventure?"

"Why sir, I told you, I like to see. And you are fond of mist, you and your hills. No sir, you may listen. When I looked from my window this morning it was all mist above me so I took horse and rode——"

"Into the mist!"

"Will you hear me?" she cried. "I rode, sir, to go where I could see, and I must needs go to the end of your world before I saw far."

"And then you turned back into the hills," said Lethenard.

"Yes, it is true. One goes back home."

"You have a home. I have a house," Lethenard said.

But the lady was still playing with her own thoughts. "I came where the hills break down into the vale. It was like coming to the end of the world. And then I saw the world far below me, a real world, and mine was not real at all, but I was alone looking down on men and women far away and I heard a bell tolling because one was dead and they were sad. But I was alone. So I am coming back home."

"What's it mean, ma'am?" Lethenard frowned.

"Sir, I don't know," says the lady.

"You talk of mysteries in me. But you are all mystery."

"Dear God, not I!" she cried. "I like life." And on a sudden she set her mare going and raced away.

Mr. Lethenard had much ado to catch her. He won thereby an invitation to dinner, but found little advantage in it. For the lady would bring her grandfather into the conversation.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. ALEXANDER

A YOUNG moon was rising in a violet sky, the last of the daylight was hardly gone, and my Lady Monox, reading the last volume of "Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded," by her window had only just rung for candles when two gentlemen rode up to the door. My lady heard the clatter and looked out with a troubled brow. It was late for anyone to come unbidden, and Sir Charles was with Squire Izod at Bourton. "Please you, my lady," the old butler came to her, "here is Dr. King and he bid me say he has brought you a guest. It's another gentleman."

My lady told him to bring Dr. King and to make two rooms ready. She set her book down and gazed at the night. She was pale.

Dr. King bustled in, red and smiling: "My lady, your most devoted," he jerked a bow at her, looked over his shoulder to see that the door was shut and stood aside to make way for his companion, a tall man who bore himself with easy strength. "Sir, I beg leave to present my lady Monox."

The tall man put up his hand. "Faith doctor, that was not well said. It is we who ask leave to wait upon my lady —having forced ourselves upon her."

My lady was standing. "Sir, you are gracious to honour our house." She made a curtsey.

"I have learnt that Sir Charles Monox is worth any honour I can give. Alas, my lady, all the honour I give now, is danger."

My lady looked up into a frank, handsome face, the face of a bold boy marked with hard living. "Sir, to be in danger for you must be our pride. And what we have we hold for you."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The Prince kissed her hand. "You give me hope, madam. It is almost the best thing that anyone can give, even a woman."

Dr. King had been several minutes without talking. He could bear it no longer. "Fie, sir, there is no danger in Cotswold, I promise you. Here are none that are not your friends and eager for you, as you shall find. But by your leave, my lady, we have ridden long and hard. Twenty-four hours for a long hundred miles!" He chuckled and rubbed his hands. "That is no bad going for a doctor of divinity, sir."

"Faith, doctor, you go fast enough. When a parson is in a hurry there is no holding him."

Lady Monox asked if she might take the Prince to his room.

"You may not, my lady." He smiled. "I am Mr. Alexander, Dr. King's friend, a gentleman from Oxford. My Lady Monox is not to attend on him. If you are something short with him, so much the better."

"Sir, I will do my endeavour," my lady said, and rang the bell and told the butler to show the gentlemen their rooms and have some supper for them.

"My God, doctor," says Mr. Alexander, when the two were alone, "she learnt that lesson quick enough. She did it mighty natural. I think my lady is not in love with me."

Dr. King delivered an oration on the eminent loyalty of the house of Monox.

And if Mr. Alexander found my lady's welcome something cold and dutiful, he had not to complain of her lord. For Sir Charles coming home to find the two gentlemen at table was fervent in delight that he had at last his Prince in his house. He could not in his slow way say enough to satisfy his gratitude, and while Dr. King plunged on into plans for the great adventure, how many of the gentry could be counted on, how many of their men they would bring in, how many stand of arms there were in the great barn at Upper Humble, how much powder hidden by the Welsh Way, Sir Charles was still breaking in with exultations. They sat late: long after my lady had come to her child's bedside, and looked at him in his sleep and knelt by him to pray and gone lonely to bed.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Nevertheless Sir Charles was up and at his desk betimes. He had to write letters of summons to Squire Izod and to Mr. Lethenard. For the hundredth time he had to go over the roll of the gentlemen on whom he relied. Mr. Alexander was not so early. Mr. Alexander did not appear at the hour of breakfast. Dr. King warned my lady that she would wait long if she waited till he came down, and advised her to send a tankard to his room and forget him till noon."

"I hope the—the gentleman is well, doctor? Doesn't he eat breakfast?"

Dr. King looked at Sir Charles and chuckled. "Never fear, my lady. He is sound as a bell. And you'll find him a mighty good trencherman. But not in the morning."

My lady made her meal and left the gentlemen to themselves and went to look for her son. His pony brought him back to her safe, she kissed him, which though surprised he endured with a gentlemanly resignation, and bearing no malice he required her to play with him. They were at battledore and shuttlecock when Mr. Alexander jumped out of the morning room window. The boy was delighted with this deed of daring. The lady said that the doctor and Sir Charles were at business in the library.

"My God, I know it!" Mr. Alexander made a grimace. "It is why I escaped. Sirrah, do you laugh at me?" He turned to the child. "I challenge you."

"You did make a funny face," said the child, and made one like it.

"Sir, you are a rogue." Mr. Alexander attacked him and after a desperate battle put him on his back and returned to his mother. "I make you my compliments, my lady. That's a pretty fellow, a bold, gay fellow. Sir Charles is fortunate—and you."

"Sir, I have let myself think so." The lady looked at him gravely.

The child arrived upon Mr. Alexander demanding that he should fight again. Mr. Alexander said that he wished to fight another day and glanced at my lady with a faint smile. "It's the principle of my life, is not it?"

"Well, play then." The child commanded and took her battledore from his mother and gave it to Mr. Alexander. So my lady was left to look on while they played.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Dr. King and Sir Charles, working on the other side of the house, heard a horse and looked out, expecting Izod or Lethenard. "Lord, it's the Lovel!" says Dr. King chuckling. "The fair maid of the golden fleece! You are in a hurry, my dear."

Sir Charles started up. "I believe she had better not come to him yet. To tell you the truth, doctor, I am not sure of Miss Lovel. I don't know how far she will go with us."

"Is it so?" Dr. King frowned. "What, has that dog Zouch worked on her? Go and catch her then. I'll find our friend and keep him close. But before they could do either, Miss Lovel had been told that my lady was in the old garden and they saw her crossing the lawn to that party of battledore and shuttlecock. "Let it be, it's no matter," said Dr. King gloomily. "She will only see Mr. Alexander. She knows nothing. But I wish the wench had stayed at home. It's ill work letting a woman come on a secret which you dare not tell her."

Sir Charles, who was himself suffering from some confusion of mind, shook his head sagely and they went back to the library to work on the muster roll.

Miss Lovel swept up to my lady and took both her hands and smiled at her. It is believed that Susan Lovel kissed in public less than any woman of her time. "Your most devoted, ma'am," says she.

My lady began to walk away with her. Miss Lovel found it strange, for my lady was not used to forsake the society of her son nor to be superfluous to his pleasures. She looked down on my lady's face and saw some trouble. She allowed herself to be led on. But Mr. Alexander, having seen her magnificence, hit the shuttlecock over the yew hedge, left the child to go and fetch it, and strode up to the women. My lady had no choice. "My dear, here is Mr. Alexander, a friend of Dr. King's, who is with us. Miss Lovel of Ashcombe, sir."

Mr. Alexander made his bow.

The lady, who held Mr. Alexander guilty of troubling Dorcas Monox, put back her head and looked at him under drooping lids in a way that several gentlemen of Cotswold had seen. After a moment her eyes opened, her lips parted

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

a little, she confessed surprise. She sank to the ground in a curtsey of grand ceremony, a curtsey which lasted for calculable time.

My lady flushed, my lady was ill at ease.

Mr. Alexander also had something more blood in his long face. But he smiled and his eyes gleamed as he watched her. "I have heard much of Miss Lovel: now I know I have not heard enough," he said. "Faith, they did not tell me half."

"Indeed, sir, I believe I have grown," says the placid voice.

"Into a goddess, madam."

"Mr. Alexander sees me with new eyes."

"I never saw the sun shine till now."

"Faith, I think the sun shines brighter in Italy."

"Why, madam, have you left your heart there?"

"I thank you, sir. It stays with me:" she put her hand to her bosom "a quiet, peaceable heart."

"No wonder it loves such a home," says he. "But did no one in Italy every try to carry it off, Miss Lovel?"

"Sir, not that I know."

"Fie, what a country your Italy must be," he laughed. "Is there no man in it?"

"Indeed, there are few like Mr. Alexander," she smiled. "I remember but one. I think he was a Count of Albany, or so they called him. He came to a ball in Florence——"

"Where Miss Lovel was dancing? And did he not see her? Devil take the fellow, he was blind."

"Oh, sir, he had eyes. But I think they belonged to a Marchesa—a Marchesa—to be sure the woman had a name—all the town knew it"—she contemplated Mr. Alexander with mild curiosity.

The small boy arrived. "I can't find my shuttlecock," the small boy accused earth and heaven.

"We will find it, dear," said his mother, and eagerly swept him away.

"So Miss Lovel does not remember the lady?" Mr. Alexander smiled.

"Pray, sir, do you?"

"Madam, I can now think only of one. I am proud that you remember the man." He made her a bow. "Well,

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

you play a keen game, Miss Lovel. And you have won. I confess—my sins. I am my father's son. Pray, be as frank to me. She that is not with me is against me. I stand at your mercy. For which King are you ? "

" Sir, I have no choice now ! " the lady bent her head. " If I wished to choose."

" Miss Lovel will forgive me that I did not meet her in my own name," the Prince said. " I have to think of the safety of my friends."

" Sir, your friends are mine. It is of them I am thinking," says she gravely.

" So Miss Lovel has no welcome for me ? "

" I am a woman, sir——"

" Faith, I had almost guessed it," the Prince laughed. " I think of those I know."

" And I—I am the unknown. But confess, madam, it has some interest."

" Like going into the dark," says she, looking at him steadily.

" Miss Lovel is frightened ? " he smiled.

" Why, sir, would you have me afraid of you ? "

" Not till you find it delicious to be afraid," he drew closer.

" Oh, that is the woman's part."

" You should know. What is the most delightful thing to a woman ? "

Miss Lovel gazed at His Royal Highness in calm consideration. " Sometimes," said she, " I think it is going to sleep. Sometimes I think it is waking up."

" Miss Lovel has led a lonely life ? "

" Sir, I did not know it. I think I have never wanted anything that I had not."

" It is a boast, madam ? " the Prince cried. " Or a rebuke ? "

" Indeed, sir, I meant it for neither." But he had the honour to which few men ever attained, of making her blush.

" I have spent my life in wanting what I had not," he said sharply. " It is not wise, I believe you. My God, it was what I was made for."

" Sir, I ask your forgiveness," says the lady in a low voice.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I forgot that I was speaking to Prince Charles. Indeed I was thinking only of Susan Lovel. She is a creature who pleases me too well." She looked up at him. "I am ashamed before you."

He took her hand and kissed it. "You are a woman to make a man noble. No, here is nothing to forgive. It is true, always I am craving for what I have not. Only believe that I do not fight for my own gain. I fight for the cause God gave me."

"God speed you, sir," she said gently.

"That never sounded so well! I must believe it. Forward—into the dark! But you go with me. Come, you must wear my colours." He turned and broke a spray of white roses.

She made him a curtsey, she put it into her bosom and he kissed her cheek.

The gentlemen in the library were still without Squire Izod, but Lethenard had come to them. "Ha, Charles, so the doctor has taken us by surprise?"

"I believe we are ready, Geoffrey," Sir Charles corrected him.

"Oh, we're damned ready. And this is the grand affair at last?"

"God willing, my boy, God willing," Dr. King nodded and rubbed his hands.

"Amen, so be it. And how is our gentleman? In good heart?"

"Oh, he is blithe and as keen and hard as yourself."

"Takes after me every way, does he? Damme, he couldn't do better, could he, Charles? But what have you done with him? Don't I say how do you do?"

"My dear fellow!" Sir Charles was shocked. "Of course I shall present you to the Prince at once. It is why I sent for you. You and Izod. No one else has been told."

"Here's honour! Many thanks, Charles. But Izod hasn't come?" Lethenard laughed. "Perhaps he isn't as eager as I am. Well, here am I. Where is His Royal Highness?"

"The Prince is in the garden," said Sir Charles, "with my lady and Miss Lovel."

"What, is she in it already?" Lethenard cried.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I hope she will be with us heartily," Sir Charles hesitated. "I can't tell."

"You go too fast, Geoffrey," Dr. King broke in. "We don't trust him with her yet. She don't know he's the Prince. He is Mr. Alexander, if you please, a young fellow I brought from Oxford. We'll see what he makes of her."

"Damne, you are too careful, doctor," Lethenard sneered. He looked at the clock. "Well, Izod don't hurry himself. You might as well introduce me to Mr. Alexander."

"My dear fellow! With all my heart," says Sir Charles.

They went into the garden. My lady was not to be seen. The Prince, with Miss Lovel's hand on his arm, was walking slowly by a hedge of sweetbriar. They turned, the Prince was smiling and talking eagerly, the lady benign. He touched the white roses she wore in her bosom; she looked down at his hand and met his eyes. She did not object.

"Faith, he is making something of her, doctor," Lethenard laughed.

The Prince became aware that gentlemen were waiting on him. He stopped, he was seen to make excuses to Miss Lovel. He came to them. "You bring me another friend, Sir Charles?"

"Sir, there are many in Cotswold. None more loyal than Mr. Geoffrey Lethenard. I believe none will serve you better."

"My father would not have me forget the name of Lethenard," says the Prince. "I am happy that there is still a Lethenard to be my friend!"

Lethenard bowed low. "Sir, you have done me too much honour."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XV

MEDITATIONS OF MR. BOTYNOR

WHAT delayed Squire Izod was Peter Botynor. The letter of summons to Battle Manor had not been long in the squire's hands when Mr. Botynor also was brought to him.

The squire sat at ease in an arbour above his bowling-green, his wig off, his breeches loose at the knee, a long pipe in his mouth, and his kennel book in his lap. He stuffed the letter away when he saw Peter.

"Odds life, is it you? You don't often show your round face, my buck!" He called for a couple of tankards.

"You are a busy man, squire."

"Busy enough, busy enough," the old fellow nodded. "Ecod, it all comes to Jerry Izod," he chuckled self-satisfaction but his little eyes looked at Peter sharply. The tankards came and they drank to each other. "Well, boy, what has brought you to the old man?"

"Why, sir, I wondered if you had heard any more of Jessie Marner?"

"Oons, what the devil would I hear? The wench is dead, ain't she?"

"Yes, sir, but it don't end there. I suppose we haven't heard the last of it."

"How do you mean, last of it?"

"Why, sir, do you think Zouch will hang?"

"By God, there's not a jury in Gloucestershire would let him off. The bloody villain!" The squire drank and looked over the rim of the tankard. "What have you got in your head, Peter?"

"The fellow has strong friends, sir. He won't go down without a fight."

The squire sat up. "Look 'e, my boy, you're no

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

friend to Zouch, are you? Who are you busy for?"

"Why, sir, I am thinking of the girl. She was one of my people at Humble."

It was the one plea of duty that Squire Izod would care for. "That's right," he nodded. "That's right, my boy."

"If it was Zouch that killed her, let him hang and be damned. But I want no blunders about it."

"That's right," said the squire again, "that's reason. Ecod, there is no doubt though. The government dare not bring him off. You heard the evidence, Peter."

"Yes. But there is more than you had in court, isn't there? Charles said something about a letter."

"We didn't get that till after. We sent the constables over to Ashcombe for his traps. We had the things searched," he winked at Peter. "It would ha' done no harm to get a look at what was passing between the dog and his dirty government. But he kept nothing. There was nothing but private stuff—and this bit of a letter from the wench. Only a half-dozen words to say she would be out by the mill. She signed it just Jessie. We showed it to her father and he said it was her hand sure enough."

"Who found it, sir?"

"What do you mean, found it? There were half-a-dozen of us there, me and Eltone and old Joe Mustoe and Lethenard and the clerk and his boy to search."

"I see." Peter looked at the old fellow with a questioning eye. It seemed to him that Squire Izod was aware of something odd about the letter. "What did you make of it, sir?"

"Why, it damns the dog, don't it?"

"Have you got it, sir?"

"Ecod, no. It's gone to Gloucester with the depositions. What do you mean?"

"Why, sir, this letter puzzles me. I suppose Jessie did not carry a letter from Humble to Ashcombe herself. Who did?"

"Ecod, I can't tell. She might have got it to him a dozen ways."

Peter stared: and it seemed to him that Squire Izod flinched. "She might," Peter said. "Sir, will you speak

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

frankly? Are you satisfied that Zouch killed Jessie Marner?"

"What's that mean, Peter?"

"It was mighty convenient to put the murder on Zouch. But who did it?"

The squire gathered himself together. "Look 'e, boy, I swear to God I haven't meddled in it, first and last. There's evidence we had in court enough to hang him."

"But you don't believe it?"

"Ecod, he had no answer. And the girl's dead. We'll talk the clock round and know no more. It's a foul business. Let it go."

"A foul business," Peter agreed and therewith left him.

Thus Squire Izod was delayed. Even when he had got rid of Peter he was in no hurry to present himself at Battle Manor. His mind was disturbed.

A disturbed mind Mr. Botynor also carried with him as he rode slowly homeward by the track which wound along the green slopes above the stream. All the valley was full of sunshine and the air heavy with the odours of heat. Mr. Botynor was weary of the world. It seemed to him vague and confused, and his mind, which liked certainty, could find little to rely upon. One thing, indeed, he had established, and that was what he had never thought of. Old Izod was not comfortable about the case. A very odd thing. A shrewd fellow, old Izod, but Peter had never suspected him of a love of justice. What was the squire afraid of? Peter could not believe that he had been playing tricks. He was not nice, he would be very ready to use any advantage against a man who was in his way. In fact, he had done so. But he must be telling the truth when he swore he had not meddled with the evidence. Only why did he find it necessary to swear? He must think that it looked as if somebody had been meddling. Yes. The squire did not like that letter.

But the letter was crazy. No one could think it likely poor Jessie ever wrote to Zouch; that she should write and not a creature know of her writing was even less likely. The scrap of a letter that was found might have been written to anyone, might have been forged. But that it should have been thrust into Zouch's baggage to make false

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

evidence was most unlikely of all. Why should any man be such a fool of a villain? There was good evidence against Zouch without. They had him in gaol already, which was all they wanted.

Mr. Botynor, who had been letting his horse go as it chose, gathered the reins and stopped. "Now, what the devil am I thinking?" he said. "They—who are they? I have got it into my head that some fellows have fixed this charge on Zouch to get him out of the way. Very well. The squire has no hand in that. He thinks it may be so and he don't like it. Who then? Charles?" he laughed. "Our good Charles! No. Geoffrey Lethenard? To be sure, I would not like to be in Lethenard's way. But whatever he is, he is no fool. If he set himself to trump up evidence, he would know where to stop. But if he knew old Izod was uneasy about the case: if Izod was grumbling and looking queer, why then, I can believe Geoffrey wouldn't stick at a trifle."

"Is that it? Lethenard threw in the letter to keep the honest fellows quiet; to persuade them it was a fair charge? He was there when it was found. He was the only one of them who could know Jessie's hand. Yes, Geoffrey Lethenard knew her better than any of us. Good God!" Mr. Botynor was horrified by his own thoughts. "Lethenard! How far would he go? Is he a death or glory Jacobite, like Charles? I can't tell. He had his private grudge against Zouch. He wants the Lovel himself. And Zouch was in the way. To be sure Zouch had something to do with Jessie. They were together when I came back from Ashcombe. And Lethenard was with Jessie after I saw them. Faith, if it was a question is Zouch or Lethenard the man to do a murder, I wouldn't say Zouch. But the fellow must be a fiend who killed poor Jessie. That child! Kill her to get a man hanged for it and so come at the woman you want? Lord, Lethenard's human after all. I won't believe it." Mr. Botynor rode on fast.

And still the memory of the squire's uneasiness troubled him. There must be some ugly doubts in the old man's head: and what Squire Izod thought, Peter well knew other men would be thinking. Not the majestic Charles, but the squire, was the leader men looked to in Cotswold.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

If Izod thought the Zouch affair was queer it would be worth any risk to quiet him. To be sure, the letter had not served for that. It troubled him the more. The squire was too shrewd. What did he know—or guess?

"I wish I had not been so long abroad," Peter sighed. "I am no better than a stranger."

Wherein he did himself wrong, for he knew his country and the ways of it well, and it was in his nature to understand what other people were thinking and feeling. But he suffered, you have seen, from a sense of duty. He was driven to do something in this matter of Jessie Marner and did not know what to do. "The times are out of joint," he would grumble. "And I am not the man to set them right."

He applied himself to study men and things in Cotswold, seeking discreetly near and far from all manner of people enlightenment upon the relations of Jessie and Lethenard and their manner of life while he had been abroad. He found little to help him. Poor Jessie had lived in the face of day and every one liked her. Lethenard lived to himself and for himself and nobody liked him much, but everybody thought him a tremendous fellow. It had occurred to no one to link their names. But some people in Humble did say that poor Jessie had grown fond of going out o' nights. And Peter condemned himself as a man with a muck rake.

The leaders of the Jacobites he avoided. He did not want to make it known that his suspicions were active. But as he moved among the smaller fry he found a certain agitation. It was plainly expected that something was to happen any day, any hour. Peter was not much impressed by that. Something had always been just about to happen and he had learnt to doubt that the elimination of Zouch was made in the Jacobite interest. He did not think it necessary to go and ask his sister about it. What did impress him was that these young fellows of Cotswold were in a bad temper. They seemed to think there was too much mystery about the business. But, indeed, they were mysterious to Mr. Botynor and to one another.

On a day as he rode back from Temple Guiting over the lonely high land where no house was to be seen in many miles, and he expected no human creature but the shepherd

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

who had the flock from the Wold Farm, he saw a man on horseback talking to that shepherd. The fellow soon set his horse going and made for Mr. Botynor and asked a direction to the Fosse Way. "Sir, I'll show it you, if you please. It's near enough to my house," said Peter, who wondered what brought the fellow out on the hills.

He was a little man with a brown, sharp face and a bright eye. He dressed like a tradesman, cheaply and very plain. His sturdy cob carried saddle-bags. He had plenty to say of many things, the small news of the day, the roads, the inns, people, politics, crops. It seemed at first that he was fishing to find out what kind of man Peter was. Then that suspicion vanished as he chattered of food and drink, Cotswold mutton and Hereford beef, Gloucester eels and Fairford trout and the excellence of brawn and faggots when corrected by sound brandy. Cider was good, to be sure, and they brewed good ale in Oxford. But, after all, a man wanted a vintner. He sang the praises of claret, of burgundy, but for increase of all joys and comfort in all distress there was surely nothing like brandy.

"Sir, you have thought deeply on these matters," Peter smiled.

The little man winked. "It's my trade," said he. And it emerged that he was in Cotswold to sell good liquor that had never paid duty. If Peter wanted anything in that way, a word to Jack Martin at the Woolpack in Stow would do the trick.

Peter was much obliged to him and hoped the roads were safe.

"The gaugers, is it?" says the little man. "Never fear for them, sir. Good honest men, they know which side their bread's buttered." And then a wave of doubt came over him. "Was it them you was thinking of, sir?"

"Why, who else?" Peter stared.

"Maybe it's wrong what I've heard," the little man hesitated. "But they do say there's been some queer doings about your Cotswold country. A pack of rogues coming out of Wychwood, robbing and murdering. Yon shepherd, he said there was some camping awhile back by the Fosse. Have you had any nasty business in your parts, sir?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Peter was startled. Of course there were rogues in Wychwood: it had ever been a sanctuary of gipsies and poachers and thieves. But it was news to Peter that they had been out on the Cotswold roads. No one had said anything to him of a Wychwood gang camping by the Fosse. "Mr. Martin, you seem to know more than I do," he said.

"Me, sir?" it was the little man's turn to stare. "I'm a stranger, a Bristol man. I only know what the folks are saying hereabouts. Ain't it true, then?"

"It's true there was a girl murdered awhile back."

"Lord love us! That's nasty work. But you don't put that on the Wychwood lads, Mr. Botynor?"

"Sir, it is a gentleman who is in gaol for it."

"Well, to be sure!" the little man shook his head over the iniquity of the world. "Maybe he got the rogues to do the trick for him?"

"Mr. Martin, you are full of ideas!"

"Now you're laughing at me, Mr. Botynor," the little man complained. "I was only thinking it's more like a gentleman to get his murders done for him. But it don't matter. It ain't murder I'm afraid of. You do put me off, sir. What I mean to say, do you reckon it's likely these rogues are making the roads dangerous. Suppose my lads were bringing a few ankers o' brandy along, would these rascals get hold of the stuff?"

"If they did they would raise the county against them." Peter smiled. "Stop smuggled brandy! An outrage! We're honest folk in Cotswold, Mr. Martin."

"Ah!" the little man sighed relief. "I'm mighty glad to hear you say so. You know sometimes when these budge rascals are busy, there's gentry behind 'em. That's bad, that is. But if so be it's only them, we can look after ourselves."

Peter did not doubt it. He had seldom met a man who seemed more capable of looking after himself than Mr. Martin. That little man proceeded to explain the methods by which good liquor was landed before it reached the port of Bristol and distributed over the west country. Before they parted Peter had given him an order for brandy—out of curiosity to see whether any would arrive.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

For he inclined to believe that Mr. Martin was not a breaker of the law but an agent thereof. Mr. Martin's ingenious conversation bore too closely on the affair of Jessie Marner. If Zouch had come to Cotswold to spy out the land for the government, it was not in the least likely that the government would quietly submit to what a Cotswold jury and Cotswold magistrates chose to do with him. Government would want to know something more about the evidence. Mr. Martin was just the fellow for the job. Mr. Martin seemed to have done wonderfully well. Mr. Martin could tell them a great deal—if he was telling the truth.

And was he? An odd thing that no word should have been said to coroner or magistrate of any vagabonds camping near the place of the murder. But it could not serve Mr. Martin to say so to Mr. Botynor unless he had some reason to believe in it. Suppose he had, suppose he was fishing for more evidence, suppose he wanted to know if these rascals were in the employ of the Jacobite gentry, and his conversation with Mr. Botynor was reasonably explained. Sir William Zouch, giving instructions whom to seek for an honest opinion, might be moved to suggest the name of Peter Botynor. Peter admitted the probability with a rueful smile. Zouch had never concealed his opinion that Mr. Botynor was a good, worthy simpleton. And Mr. Botynor began to think that he was right.

Why, if there had been a Wychwood gang about Humble, behold an explanation of the manner of Jessie's murder. That Zouch, that Lethenard, would kill a woman so Peter had never found it easy to believe. But the rough, brutal way of it was in the way of the outlaws of Wychwood. It's like a gentleman to get his murders done for him," quoth the wise Mr. Martin. Had they been brought in to destroy Jessie? Because she had blabbed some secret to Zouch—or merely to make a crime with which Zouch could be charged?

"Lord, it's devilish," Peter groaned. "Lethenard's hard enough and reckless—but this!"

And yet—and yet—if Squire Izod knew something of Wychwood cut-throats being handy—if he knew that Lethe-

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

nard did business with them—well, that would explain why the squire was uncomfortable.

But was Mr. Martin only guessing? Were there any vagabonds about at the time of the murder? That at least could be proved. And before Peter went to dinner it was proved. His own bailiff remembered those horsecopers camping by the copse on the Fosse. Other men had seen them. Nobody had thought anything about them.

It was a poor appetite that Peter Botynor brought to dinner.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XVI

MISS LOVEL SENDS INVITATIONS

MR. FETTIPLACE sat under a syringa reading the Homeric hymns. He looked up from the Greek to enjoy the white blossom and its fragrance; he read again and looked across a pool of water lilies to the amber gleam of the rivulet below and the long green hill beyond and went back to the Greek. "The deeds of golden Aphrodite, the queen of Cyprus, who waked sweet love in the gods and conquered the tribes of mortal men. . . ."

And the only thing which could increase his felicity was added to him. His granddaughter came. She wore a dress that he loved, a dress which had as little of a hoop as any woman could dare, and flowed about her like a stream of silver. Her neck was bare and her bosom, her hair was bound in a mass of gold behind her head.

Mr. Fettiplace smiled.

She made him a curtsey and sat on the stone seat beside him. "Your worship has had no company?"

"No, I think not," said Mr. Fettiplace. "Yes, there were some youths. They appeared to have no minds. It is wrong in you to leave me naked to mine enemies."

"I went to see Dorcas Monox, my dear," she paused.

"I hope her ladyship is in good spirits."

"Why do you say that, sir?"

"Sometimes I have thought her solemn for a young woman. Sir Charles goes heavily to my taste."

"I believe you are hard to please in husbands," the lady smiled and paused again.

"I promise you I am," says he eagerly.

"Sir, we will study to please you. But it does not press. Pray, now, guess who I have seen?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Mr. Fettiplace put the tips of his fingers together. "I believe it is some one she is interested in," he pronounced. "But this is very rare. Indeed, I did not know there was such a man."

"The creature is a man," Miss Lovel admitted, "and very like the sex."

"It is perhaps a compliment?"

"Lord, sir, there be plenty mannish men."

Mr. Fettiplace sighed. "It is very natural you should think so. What is interesting in this one?"

"He is a Prince. In fact he is the Prince. The Young Chevalier."

"I am sorry for it," said Mr. Fettiplace.

"For me, sir?"

"I believe I was not thinking of you," said Mr. Fettiplace, looking at her with great affection. "I am sorry for him. I am sorry that he has come."

"Why, sir, what else can he do? He must adventure. He cannot forsake his own cause."

"He must venture," Mr. Fettiplace repeated. "That is his inheritance."

"You have no hope for him, sir?"

"I am perhaps an old man," Mr. Fettiplace sighed. "Well. Things must be as they may. He stays with Charles Monox?"

"I hope not, sir. I think Miss Lovel should have him at Ashcombe."

Mr. Fettiplace put his hand in hers which turned and took it. "Have you told him so, child?" he said anxiously.

"My dear, Miss Lovel was shy," she smiled. "It is Mr. Fettiplace must speak for her."

"He is in danger wherever he goes in England."

"Is it so? Even among these gallant Cotswold gentlemen? I can't tell. But if he is in danger, I think we should have our share of it."

Mr. Fettiplace did not deny that. He only looked an unhappy old man.

His granddaughter kissed him. "Fie, sir, don't take it so heavily. You are as solemn as Charles Monox. Let's not make a tragedy of it. The lad is here and we must do

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

what's best. I think we can guide him more wisely than these dreamers at Battle. Pray, sir, won't you wait upon him and beg the honour of his royal presence. They cannot grudge him to us. They cannot be jealous of Mr. Fettiplace. And I think our gentleman will be apt to try a merrier house." She smiled. "The poor boy! I want him, sir."

Mr. Fettiplace looked down at his thin, small hands. They trembled a little.

He said nothing. By his rules of life the girl was right and he confessed it. Like the Prince, who was born to be a Pretender, she also had her inheritance, she must be loyal to him though he led a forlorn hope, it was the debt of her blood. He could not make argument against her honour. He wished the Prince a thousand miles away; he wished with all his heart that she had not chosen to discover he was a man. The lad was only too well able to make his profit of that. But Mr. Fettiplace had wit enough not to say so.

He was an old gentleman who liked to face fate, and after dinner he took the coach and drove to Battle Manor. His granddaughter watched him go with some regret marking her placid face. "Well!" says she. "At least it will be best for Dorcas." She turned away and looked at herself in the mirror. "And you, my child? Well? who knows?" She sat down and began to write to Peter Botynor.

Mr. Fettiplace found himself received by Sir Charles and Dr. King with respectful ceremony which did not conceal a certain surprise. He also was nervous. He hoped that he was not wrong to come unbidden. They interrupted one another protesting that he was the first gentleman they meant to summon. Mr. Fettiplace was most deeply obliged. Then he might wait upon—Mr. Alexander? They declared that Mr. Alexander would never forgive them if they failed to present Mr. Fettiplace. He ventured to hope that he would not be thought presumptuous if he asked Mr. Alexander to visit his house at Ashcombe. The two gentlemen looked at each other. Dr. King's delight was plain, and when he had got over his amazement Sir Charles, too, was visibly gratified.

Mr. Alexander was even more amiable. He received Mr.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Fettiplace with admirable grace, the deference of a young man for an old mingling with royal gratitude for old services that could never be rewarded. Mr. Fettiplace was encouraged to hope that the Prince would honour his house at Ashcombe. The Prince bowed and smiled. "Mr. Fettiplace, I shall challenge you to keep your word. I promise you, I am more apt to weary my friends than forget them. You will find me at Ashcombe before you look for me."

Mr. Fettiplace, having been given some more of the royal favour, took his leave with proper gratitude; and driving home confessed to himself sorrowfully that the youth had charm.

"An excellent good fellow, Monox," says the Prince, yawning. "What, I suppose I must go to the old gentleman some day? He's handsomely eager."

"Sir, it would be kind and I do not doubt it would be wise."

"He's a great man still, is he? Well, I am my Lady Monox's guest and much content to be so. I am in your hands, my good friend."

"Oh, sir, there's no doubt you should go to Ashcombe," says Dr. King eagerly. "The Ashcombe influence is worth anything to us."

So they settled it, the Prince amiably agreeing to all he was told and no gentleman breathing the name of Susan Lovel.

But afterwards, when Dr. King was alone with Sir Charles and their endless task of plan-making, "Thank God, that's come happily off," says the doctor.

"I have done Fettiplace an injustice," Sir Charles pronounced. "I did not think his heart was with us."

The doctor laughed. "Why, I believe one must thank the Lovel for it. Faith, it was a stroke of luck brought her in on us. She came, she saw, he conquered. God bless the lad, he has a way with him. Well, we have Ashcombe now. She's not one to flinch, I think. Quidquid vult, valde vult. What she wants she wants mightily. She'll throw all in."

Sir Charles did not care for his tone. "I believe they will not fail us, sir. It is the way of their family to do more

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

than ever they promise. I wish to God I were as sure of others."

"You may say so!" Dr. King nodded. "What the devil ailed Izod?"

Sir Charles shook his head. They had argued this out before and found no comfortable explanation. The day had not gone kindly for them. To find Lethenard meet the Prince's courtesies with sardonic gloom, to have Lethenard offer nothing in conference on their plans but grim objections, was awkward but not surprising. It was agreed among his familiars that Lethenard had a black devil. But Squire Izod startled them, the old fellow was mighty slow in coming, mighty sullen when he came. He was no more than civil to the Prince. He was a good deal less to them. He would say neither yea nor nay to anything. He sat blowing and scowling, grumbling out an awkward question now and then, breaking into a guffaw at some of Lethenard's objections, refusing to explain himself, to agree to anything, to promise anything, to advise anything. Even gentlemen so confident in their own inventions were compelled to suspect that something had gone awry. But what they could not tell, for the squire liked the gloomy criticism of Lethenard no better than their plans. He liked nothing. A strange condition for a man who always had opinions and wanted his own way. At last Lethenard, who kept his temper better than they looked for, turned upon him with a "Damme, squire, I don't know what you're here for."

"Nor I don't either, Mr. Lethenard," the squire growled and made haste to go, and Lethenard shrugged and said that the old fellow was drinking his wits away.

Neither Monox nor the doctor thought it likely. The hardness of the squire's head was of ancient fame. But they were compelled to agree with Lethenard that they would have the devil of a business if he stayed in that temper. Men looked to the squire for a lead. It was not to be admitted that he was afraid. If he, then any man might flinch. But the two gentlemen could not tell what to make of him.

Peter Botynor, who might have assisted them in that, ended the day in a new perplexity. A red and silver livery

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

appeared at Prior's Humble. A letter was brought to Mr. Botynor, who read these remarkable words.

It is feared that Mr. Botynor has forsworn a world which is deceitful and desperately wicked, to accomplish his salvation in an hermitage. Not seeking to disturb the contemplation of virtue, nor intending any peril of his immortal soul, Miss Lovel entreats the honour of bidding him farewell and in hope of the comfort of his countenance will dine at home o' Thursday.

The countenance of Mr. Botynor became redder than nature, not stingy in that matter, designed. "Burn her impudence," said Mr. Botynor, "What is she at now?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XVII

MISS LOVEL KISSES HANDS

THE sun of Thursday shone from a sky of silvery blue. So much of light cloud moved high over the hills that the summer heat and splendour were diminished, yet the air was lucent and the form and colour of all things stood out, and Peter remarked to himself it was like the world always looked when he was a child.

When he came to the door of Ashcombe he saw Miss Lovel walking on the terrace. She stood to wait for him. She had taken her dress, he thought, out of the sky, it was so pale a blue that the silver in it and the white about her neck passed into each other and mingled, but they were made into a dress something high and concealing for her to choose.

"Madam, your most obedient."

"Mr. Botynor is most obliging"—a bow and a curtsey and a pause and a smile. She was left to say something if anything was to be said. She said it. "Sir, you have brought a delicious day," and she looked about her.

So did he. "It is a day," he remarked, "which I should call demure."

"Mr. Botynor is nothing if not critical. Like Iago in the play. Are you Iago, Mr. Botynor?"

"Good God, madam, are you married to a Moor?"

"I believe I am a maid, sir. But you confuse me. What are we talking of?"

"Villains and marriage. Pray, madam, on which do you ask my opinion?"

"I think Mr. Botynor is no authority on either. No, it was the demure day, the day after Mr. Botynor's own heart."

"God send me no worse. But I never said so."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Indeed no. But when did you tell a creature what was in your heart?"

"And you, madam?"

"He never answers me but with a question! I tell what's in my heart! Fie, sir, it's not for me. Did I not say I was a maid? It's no courtesy to forget. But what were we talking of? Your demure day! Pray, sir, what's demure in it? There's a wonder of colour."

"I believe it's not so demure as I thought," says he, looking at her.

"Faith, that's a vile word, demure. I see a creature cool and silent and sly."

"Madam, you make everything personal. But I was universal, I was contemplating the world."

"Sir, it is what I complain of. I have to remind you that I exist."

"I assure you, no. Since I discovered it, it has never been possible for me to forget the existence of Miss Lovel."

"Mr. Botynor condescends to flatter me. Nevertheless, he forgot the way to Miss Lovel's house. He left Miss Lovel to ask for the honour of seeing him again."

"It is agreed that I am foolish," Peter said. "But I was never such a fool as to flatter Miss Lovel. She has been pleased to ask me to dinner. I came when I was asked. It was not for me to presume that the lady had any need of me before."

"I vow there's no one so solemn as you!" she cried.

"Faith, I try to keep in tune with you. I thought we had changed the key to earnest."

"The man talks of needing him! Alas, Mr. Botynor, I never needed a man yet. But some of the creatures have amused me. Pray, do you never go to see your friends till they are in need of your worship?"

"Not I, ma'am," says he coldly, "having no need of any creature. And, so in my humble wise, I resemble Miss Lovel. Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa."

"I wonder what you mean," she put back her head and looked at him from under falling eyelids.

"Mea culpa," Peter construed meekly, "I have sinned, mea maxima culpa, a dreadful sin, she looks under her eyelids, I am found impertinent."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"At least you wish to be."

"Because I dare to resemble Miss Lovel? But it is my misfortune. I had become what I am before I saw her."

"Is it possible you believe we are alike?"

"Not in body, I dare to congratulate Miss Lovel. But in spirit—it is you who said so. You never needed any creature, and blame me because I do not."

"My God, you cannot forget that word need. Sir, are you afraid I should ask something of you?" her lip curled.

"No, madam. I believe Miss Lovel would never ask for anything." He met her with frank, grave eyes. "But it is true I am afraid."

"This is the real confession," she said softly and she laughed. "What is it Mr. Botynor fears?"

"Miss Lovel may look in her glass. But she will not see."

"Ah, it is my turn to be afraid," says the placid voice. "He sees in me what I cannot see! Tell me, sir, what is my mystery."

"Madam, if I knew perhaps I should not be afraid. But you—you have the fortune to be a woman. You will never know what a woman is."

"My God, one never comes face to face with you!" she cried.

Peter laughed. "Or with you, madam."

She made an impatient movement, which was what he had never seen in her. She looked at him (so he said afterwards) from head to heel as though she were weighing him. She came closer, she put her hand on his arm, she began to speak, but what she would have said he never knew. Mr. Fettiplace tripped along the terrace with a tall fellow in his company, and the lady swept past Mr. Botynor to meet them.

Mr. Botynor, who had not supposed that she could surprise him saw, by the alarm on the face of Mr. Fettiplace, that he was thought in the way, and had hardly framed to himself the question what the devil she was at, when his amazed eyes saw her sink in a curtsey of ceremony and kiss the tall fellow's hand. The gentleman did not seem to think she was laughing at him either. He made

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

a graceful show of lifting her. "It is I who am in your hands, madam," he said.

"Sir, you are kind to honour us."

Mr. Botynor was not apt to exhibit his emotions. What he felt was in the nature of horror. He continued to gaze at Miss Lovel. The message which he wished to send her was something like, "God help you, I did not think you were such a fool."

Her Prince was smiling upon her. "I am fortunate in my friends." He gave up her hand with a flourish, he put his other hand, a mighty affectionate gentleman, on the shoulder of Mr. Fettiplace. "Faith, sir, this is a palace to which you bring me" (an elegant little bow at Miss Lovel), "and a queen."

"An old house, sir," Mr. Fettiplace shook his head. "It has come back to us after many years."

"Another omen! Mr. Fettiplace, you are all good omens for me."

"I wish it may be so," the old man said.

The lady turned, discovered with benign surprise the existence of Mr. Botynor, and turned again to her Prince. "Sir, I ask pardon, you don't find us alone. Here is the brother of Lady Monox, may I present him, Mr. Peter Botynor."

Mr. Botynor, cursing his impudence, made his bow.

The Prince smiled. "Between your hostess and your sister you are well commended, Mr. Botynor." He held out his hand. "I have one more good friend than I knew."

"Sir, I hope the ladies will never repent," Peter said.

"Faith, that's what a man always hopes, Miss Lovel," the Prince explained to her.

"Then the fellow should give us no occasion, sir."

"A dull life, madam. What, would you never know temptation?"

"Would you never know sport—said the fox to the hounds," Peter murmured.

"Mr. Botynor is severe," the Prince laughed. "A scorner of the sex, sir?"

"Oh, sir, he is our weeping philosopher. He mourns a wicked world. But the gentleman hath his shrewd

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

moments. He can tell a woman from a man sometimes. So now. He is in the right. 'The woman tempted me,' quoth Adam. That's our part." She smiled. "Pray sir, let me tempt you to dinner."

As on the first occasion when the lady had brought him to dine with her, Peter sought refuge in the conversation of Mr. Fettiplace. But it was not so easy. Not the large company of that first visit sat down at her table but only they four. Peter contrived to say something about the change. The lady, though busy with her Prince, spared a glance for him. Mr. Fettiplace said that he must not be afraid they always had a great party at Ashcombe; they had begun to live quietly: a pleasant thing; and he smiled and sighed. And Peter wondered when they began and why the youth of Cotswold had fallen away: whether in despair of capturing the lady, or shy of her after the affair of Zouch. Mr. Fettiplace was talking of the Symposium of Plato. It was not necessary to take part in the conversation.

But the lady observed Mr. Botynor's silent meditations and was not pleased. "Do you hear these sages, sir?" she complained to the Prince. "They are talking philosophy!"

"Pray, ma'am, what's that?" he laughed.

"You should ask Mr. Botynor. He is the wise man of Cotswold. He loves to lecture my grandfather."

Peter was stung to reprisals. "Mr. Fettiplace, you are the grandfather of injustice."

"You are not to blame me," the old gentleman chuckled. "It is not I who made her a woman. And who ever saw a just woman? Some things the gods themselves cannot do, Mr. Botynor."

"Mr. Botynor is unreasonable," the Prince smiled. "Who wants a woman to be just?"

"What, are you all against me?" the lady cried. "I might have known. Between men and women there's war without truce."

"If you had heard our philosophy you would know better," says Peter quickly. "For your grandfather was explaining that all the world is love. In the beginning there was neither man nor woman, but creatures who were both. Then the gods cut them asunder and the halves

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

were men and women, and ever since they have been trying to come together again."

"Is that philosophy?" the Prince drank his wine. "Faith, it's easier than I thought. And devilish truer."

"Creatures cut in half," the lady repeated with a placid eye on Mr. Botynor. "Pray, sir, were they always halves? I think the knife slipped now and then."

Peter looked innocent. "To be sure," says he meekly, "we are not all the same size."

"I think," the lady persisted, "I have found a man with a good deal of a woman in him."

"And a woman with a good deal of a man in her? Madam, it is possible. I would not deny your ambitions."

The Prince laughed at them. "Faith, this will end in bloodshed. Mr. Fettiplace, are they always so fierce?"

"Oh, sir, there is no hot blood in them," the old man smiled. "This is a fencing match for your diversion."

"Mr. Botynor," says the lady, "we are mocked."

"We amuse them, Miss Lovel," said Peter. "I entreat your pardon."

"Sir, I beg your forgiveness. Here have I brought your worship, the wise man of Cotswold, to give us your counsel and the Prince makes merry and my grandfather is satiric. We are much wronged, Mr. Botynor."

"An evil day, madam. Here am I come to do homage to your majesty the Queen of Cotswold and your grandfather pokes fun at you and the Prince laughs at your royalty. Miss Lovel, this is no world for us."

"Look how they turn on us," the Prince cried. "Mr. Fettiplace, this is what comes of trying to make peace between a man and a maid."

"Pray, sir, were you trying to make peace?" the old man was very happy. "I vow I was not."

"Mr. Botynor, they will not be serious," says the lady sadly. "Is it your fault or mine?"

"I have sometimes thought, Miss Lovel," the gentleman confessed, "that your aspect does not make men serious."

"He bids me go!" she mourned.

"A churlish fellow," the Prince cried. "Why did you bring him, madam?"

"Oh, sir, have I not said? For his sage advice. You

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

do not know Mr. Botynor. He is the wisest man. He is our Achitophel. His counsel is as if one inquired of the oracle of God."

"By my blushes, sir," says Peter hastily, "you may guess that no one ever called me such names before."

"Mr. Botynor, be comforted," the Prince smiled. "I do believe she is not always laughing at you."

"Indeed I am not. I do desire his advice. I do believe he is the wisest of us. Because he believes nothing and he wants nothing. Sir, I think you will not find many such in your party."

"Sir, you will thank God for that," Peter said.

But the Prince, who was watching Miss Lovel, did not choose to laugh. "Believes nothing—there is no lack of such. Wants nothing—that is rare enough." He turned on Peter. "Mr. Botynor is not a Jacobite? Well, perhaps I should not be if I were not Charles Stewart. It is kind in you to meet me, Mr. Botynor."

"Sir, I have never had to choose between King James and King George. But every one I care for is pledged for you. I would not desire to fail them at need."

"That is well said," Mr. Fettiplace cried eagerly.

"I thank you, sir. You are not of the stuff that fails," the Prince bowed. "Come, Mr. Botynor, you keep a cool head, you know your Cotswold country. How do you say? Is it heartily with me?"

Peter hesitated. "I can't answer that, sir. I dare not say yes or no. I believe they would rather have King James than King George. I believe they will go with you heartily if they see a fair chance to win. But if they don't like the venture"—he shrugged.

"My God, here is an oracle!" The Prince laughed. "If they think they will win, if they don't think—good God, sir, that is what I ask you. What the devil do they think?"

"I am not sure," Peter said slowly.

The Prince flung round on Miss Lovel. "He wants nothing, he believes nothing—add, that he knows nothing, madam."

"Indeed, sir, I have never found Mr. Botynor sanguine," says the placid voice.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Sir, it is easy to say what we want to hear," said Mr. Fettiplace eagerly.

The Prince recovered his temper. "Faith, Mr. Botynor, you'll keep me sober. I thank you for it. I believe I I must know more of you Cotswold gentlemen."

"Faith sir, it's what I would have asked you. You will find them shrewd and trusty."

"Sir, we hoped to make them known to you when you honoured us," said the lady.

And Peter found himself giving advice upon who should be asked to Ashcombe to meet His Royal Highness.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XVIII

MISS LOVEL'S HANDS ARE KISSED

MISS LOVEL walked beside the stream, disturbing a wagtail which ran and flitted in front of her, an excited twinkle of black and white. Miss Lovel, who disliked a restless manner, stood still and the wagtail took courage to turn and pass her and escape. It seemed to her that to be still was what she wanted, and she sat down where the yellow stone broke through the grass and listened to the murmur of the stream.

The great house was out of sight. On the glowing green slopes that rose on either side to the darkness of the woods nothing moved but deer. She was pleasantly remote from her kind. But she felt life busy all about her. A pair of magpies were scolding each other. From the hill a woodpecker laughed loud. Over the dense green spears of the iris by the stream dragon-flies moved, bronze and gold. In a flash of blue a kingfisher went by.

Susan Lovel smiled at them. They were all so earnest, so vigorous. So much like the good men at Ashcombe. And, like those men, they made her feel very benign. But, after all, it was a vague condition of mind, and she liked to feel sure—sure of herself and others. She was wont to do so and it troubled her that she did not.

Charles Monox and Dr. King had come to confer with her Prince and she had left them conferring. It was plain that they were all impatient for action. Miss Lovel was not alarmed. She had little capacity for fear. But she could not see what she was going to do.

She acknowledged there were two reasons why she had brought the gentleman to Ashcombe. Certainly she wanted to deliver Dorcas from an embarrassment; she felt in

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

her placid way that if there was to be trouble about him, it was better that she should be his hostess than poor Dorcas with her husband and her child. But also the gentleman amused her and she desired to see what she could make of him.

And now she was not sure what he was making of her. She confessed that, and then made game of the confession. "Fie, my dear, he is but a boy," she told herself. "You are old enough to be his mother." No matter if the fellow was thirty, thirty full, weary years, poor lad, ten more than her own. She felt like his mother. She only wanted to see that he did nothing wild and no harm came to him.

"My child, you want no such thing," she said. She knew that it would be mighty pleasant to see him go on his adventure. He would make a gallant fight of it. He had fire in him. Why, it must be wrong to let that smoulder out, to let him be wasted in doubts and timid caution. Better for him to go on a forlorn hope and die fighting. He had a right to his hour.

Yes. A noble lad. Of all the men that ever her eyes had seen the only one who had the look of a king. A fine figure of a man indeed. "Oh. Is that what troubles you, my dear?" she smiled. "Two long legs and a handsome face and a lordly air and you are sped. Well, you need not be ashamed of it. You are not a woman for nothing. But do not pretend it is something else."

His Royal Highness arrived. He stood behind her looking down at her face, her bosom. "So the nymph is found," he smiled.

She was not pleased with this. "I did not know I was sought," she stood up.

"But you will always be sought. You were born for that."

"Lord, sir, a weary life. Shall I never possess myself in peace?"

He shook his head. "I believe not, Miss Lovel. Too many will desire to possess you."

"You are severe, sir. I beg to think better of men; and of myself."

"Why, what have I said? I thought I praised Miss Lovel and gave men credit for taste."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Taste?" she said. "Pray, sir, trust me to make it clear what men may hope of me."

"I cannot tell how you will forbid their hopes. Every man may hope for heaven, though there's none of us deserves it."

"But I never heard it was promised to those who did not try."

"Faith, I do try," he smiled. "It seems I don't succeed. I am a miserable sinner. But what have I done wrong?"

"Lord, sir, I can't tell," said the placid voice. "But we both know it, something has gone wrong." And she looked at him with calm, wondering eyes.

"You are delicious," says he softly. "Forgive me, I am out of time. I found you when it was yourself you wanted. I blundered into your own secret place. Is it not that?" He looked about him. "Yes, it is beautiful —the quiet light through the leaves, that golden stream that sings, and you like to be a maid here."

"Do you know me?" the placid voice said.

"And then I came. I was not fortunate," he shrugged. "But I was proud that I had found you. Faith, it was an achievement, that." His Royal Highness gave forth a knowing laugh.

The lady surveyed him with mild surprise. "To follow me? Oh, a bold deed, but surely not difficult."

"You had vanished," he reminded her. "When my good friends were done with me, I asked where was Miss Lovel. Your grandfather couldn't tell, but he had some fine Greek books to show me. The butler said madam was in the garden and the gardener thought madam was gone walking. It's a noble pleasance, your park, Miss Lovel, but how many miles may there be? I thought I would be playing hide and seek with you till dinner-time. Then I remembered you like to talk of your stream and I made for it, and roused a rogue of a heron, so I knew you were not where he was. I made a cast up the slope and came on a little footprint in the dew in the shade. And I knew that was made this morning, for the sun comes on it in the afternoon to dry it all up. Then I followed the point of the foot and it brought me here. I vow that's neat work."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The lady was thinking that he was very much a boy; but a charming boy. "Sir, you have tracked me down," says she, with proper reverence. "You are a mighty hunter before the Lord."

The gaiety went out of his face suddenly. "Oh, I have learnt something of hunting. I have been hunted." He checked, listening. He spoke in a low voice. "Who is coming to us?"

"Lord, sir, I see no one."

"Some one is coming." He did not turn, he watched her face. "Who is it?"

"Yes, here is some one. Indeed, sir, it is only Mr. Lethenard."

The Prince turned; Lethenard, flushed with haste, came through the bushes of hawthorn and sloe which hid them. "I beg your pardon, sir, it is only Geoffrey Lethenard." He added a bow to Miss Lovel. "I fear some mistake. I thought I was coming to a council of war." He smiled. "I suppose this is not it."

"No, sir, this is the Court of the lady of Ashcombe."

"I kiss her majesty's hand," said Lethenard and looked at her and did not do it. "Pray, sir, is that what I have to do? I am a country fellow who don't know the ways of Courts."

"Court or country, Mr. Lethenard will know how to hold his own," said the Prince coldly.

"I thank you, sir. I must study to do so." He looked at the lady again.

"I am in Mr. Lethenard's way," said the placid voice.

"Madam, it is impossible."

"No one ever was, I believe," she was stirred to answer.

"I am sure that Mr. Lethenard and I have no secrets from Miss Lovel," the Prince said sharply.

"Sir, you are very kind to say so. Secrets? Lord, I don't deal in secrets. But I was saying—I thought there was to be a council of war—and you attend her majesty's Court, sir?"

"You come late, Mr. Lethenard. Monox and Dr. King have been with me and gone again."

Lethenard flushed. He began to say something and

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

checked himself. "I am to blame, sir. I am too slow," he said. He made some ceremony of taking leave. He was not pressed to stay.

"There's a fellow with the devil of a temper," the Prince smiled.

"Pray, sir, did your friends expect Mr. Lethenard to be with them?"

"They didn't say so."

The lady opened her eyes wider. "That is strange. Mr. Lethenard used to be in all their plans. If they leave him out, I doubt he is not the man to take it well."

The Prince looked at her with a quizzical smile. "That's the offence, is it? I am not sure, Susan." The lady bore the name without a sign of feeling. "I think Mr. Lethenard is not the man to take me well. He finds me too fortunate."

"Sir, it is not the first time I have known Mr. Lethenard bitter without reason."

"Faith, I did not say he had no reason!" the Prince laughed.

"But you will believe me when I say it."

"Why, Susan, if you say I am not fortunate, I don't want to believe you."

"Mr. Lethenard comes of a family which has suffered much for yours."

"My God, the world is full of them!" the Prince cried. "We have had our troubles too."

"Sir, I have no right to speak, who have had none. But is it for you to turn against him? He is a lonely man and ambitious and impatient," she smiled. "But he has worked for you, and——"

"And Miss Lovel has a kindness for him! I thank you, madam. I shall not forget it."

"Sir, I have a kindness for all who serve you," the placid voice said. "I would not have you lose a friend."

"Faith, your Lethenard will be a good friend if he finds me with you again."

"Sir, I think you need not speak to me so."

The Prince seized her hands. "My God, do you think I am as cool as you? Do you want this fellow?"

"I am glad that I am not as hot as you," said the

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

placid voice. "Pray, sir, be content. I have not learnt to want any man."

"I'll not be content with that, Susan." His hands were eager on hers.

"Sir, I give you what I can," she said gently. "I wish you well."

"Wish me yourself."

"I have not learnt that."

"By God, I'll teach you," he said and kissed her hands. Blood stirred in her face, and he laughed. "What, are you frightened?"

"For you, sir, yes."

"Ah, you're divine," he drew her to him, but she put up her hands against him.

"I give what I can," she said again.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XIX

MISS LOVEL'S TOAST

IT is believed that His Royal Highness misjudged Mr. Lethenard, whose feelings and motives were not simple. The Prince, a man of experience in such matters, was doubtless right to think he had evidence that Mr. Lethenard considered the lady of Ashcombe his property and resented trespassers. Mr. Lethenard was never of those who " Mislike the fair," he had perhaps allowed himself a stronger desire for Susan Lovel than he had known before, he was certainly not blind to the charms of her wealth, and whether the lady was to blame for it or no, he seems to have formed the belief that she was not disposed to resist him. But with a supreme confidence in himself, he was prone to suspicion. He saw danger often where men less bold, less arrogant, saw none, and he would strike when they saw no reason. To find the woman whom he counted his at play with the Prince was likely to shock him, for it is to be admitted that His Royal Highness had some reputation for success with women, and Mr. Lethenard held no high opinion of any woman's virtue. But the thing might have passed off well enough if he had come to it in a good temper. Mr. Lethenard was not of a Puritan delicacy. He would not have objected to his lady making use of the Prince for their common advantage. But he had not been consulted.

What His Royal Highness inexcusably forgot was the importance of Mr. Lethenard and Mr. Lethenard's consciousness of it. He was a poor man and a new man, for though his family was old, he had not, thanks to his father's exile and impoverishment, a place waiting for him in Cotswold. He had made himself important by his prowess: whether it was drinking or riding few went harder than

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Geoffrey Lethenard, whether at picquet or an election, few played a subtler or a bolder game. In counsel and in action he was indispensable to these Cotswold Jacobites. It was he who contrived to buy their muskets and powder in a dozen cunning transactions, he who managed the transport of the stuff into the hills and hid it. They treated him with respect. The younger men were afraid of him. The leaders were careful to keep him in a good humour. He was used to something more than respect from Charles Monox. The majestic Charles liked to lean on him. But he knew that he had not authority. A nod and a wink from old Izod would do more in Cotswold than all his endeavours. Men would follow the fool Monox who looked queerly at him. But he had been the power behind the leaders, he was in all their secrets, they took their plans from him. He was content to work so till he could command more. But not to work for less. And it seemed to him that they were thrusting him aside. He had not been consulted when they hurried the Prince off to Ashcombe. Ever since the Prince came he had been mighty little consulted. They were vague and confused, they tried to be rid of him. That day he had gone to Battle only to learn that Monox and the doctor were gone to the Prince. He came to Ashcombe and behold they had had a conference with the Prince and were gone again. And never a word to Lethenard. It is not wonderful that his humour was black when he found the Prince amusing himself with his lady.

The rogues were going on without him. He was not to be in their secrets at the moment of the great adventure. What the devil ailed them? He rode back to Battle. They were not there. My lady, something disturbed by his face and the smoke of his reeking horse, asked if he had news. "I can't tell if it's news," Lethenard scowled. "It's as well Charles should have it."

My lady thought Sir Charles might be at Bourton.

That unhappy horse was spurred on to Squire Izod's door.

My lady was right. The squire had Dr. King and Monox in the little room off the hall where he did his business. Mr. Lethenard, having been told that, went in without

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

being asked. "It's you, is it?" the squire blinked at him. "Come in and be damned."

"In good company," Lethenard drew up a chair between Monox and the doctor. The squire took all the other side of the table, lounging in an arm-chair with one fat shoeless leg on the other. He had no wig but a handkerchief twisted round his head. His pipe smoked fast. "Have they been plaguing you, squire?" Lethenard smiled. "Faith, they have given me a devil of a time. I don't know what they're at."

On each side a gentleman turned towards him. "What are you saying?" the doctor cried. "Upon my soul, Lethenard!" said Monox.

The squire took his pipe out of his mouth and pointed with it at Mr. Lethenard. "What the devil brought you here?" he growled.

"Damme, I've been looking for these shy fellows all day. They're grown so proud a man can't come at them, squire. I went to Battle to meet them this morning. They had taken themselves to be private with the Prince, if you please. And never a word to any of us. I went to Ashcombe after them and they had done their business and gone, our privy councillors. I turned back to Battle and my lady said the great men were to tell Squire Izod as much as was good for him. I hope they have. You don't look grateful, squire."

The squire smoked on. "You've run after 'em, my lad, you have. And now you've found 'em. And they're devilish glad to see you, ain't they? And so am I, ecod."

"My dear Izod!" Sir Charles protested. "Pray let's keep our tempers."

"I have not lost mine," Lethenard smiled. "But what have they been doing to you, squire?"

The squire took out his pipe. "It ain't what they ha' been doing to me, my lad. It's what I ha' been doing to them that makes the gentlemen uncomfortable. I ha' been giving them a piece of my mind. About Geoffrey Lethenard."

"It seems I came in good time," said Lethenard. "You are mighty kind to concern yourselves with me. And I

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

shall be glad to hear what you found to say about me."

"Why, man, you mustn't take it so," Dr. King was talking before he had finished. "The squire's making game of you. Faith, Izod, this is going too far. We're all friends here. We are all engaged. The King's service must not suffer. Let's stand heartily together. My dear Lethenard, I promise you, you have nothing to complain of. Come, Izod, you are a poor host. We go thirsty. Let's have a bottle of wine and——"

"Damme, you may have a dozen," the squire got on his feet. "But I drink with no man nursing something against him."

"Is that for me, Mr. Izod?" said Lethenard quietly.

"It is so, my lad."

"I have done nothing against you. If any man has told you so, he lies."

"My good friend," Dr. King protested anxiously, "this is wicked work. We are all bound to the same cause. For God's sake, let's have no quarrels."

"What's in your mind, Mr. Izod?"

"Ay, you shall have it. I'll not go on with you, Lethenard. We'll do no good if you're in the game."

"Pray, gentlemen, is this agreed among you?" Lethenard turned to the others.

"No, no, God forbid," says Dr. King. "I protest I deplore it, Lethenard. But we must do as we can. The squire"—he waved his hands—"the squire won't hear us. He swears it must be so."

"Am I to count you my enemy, Mr. Izod? You will be so good as to give me a reason. I know none."

The squire laughed. "Ask Parson Marner, my lad."

"It's this cursed affair with Zouch, Lethenard," Sir Charles groaned. "The squire says there is talk about it and you are blamed."

"You're too clever, Mr. Lethenard," the squire growled. "Too clever for honest folk."

"Faith, squire, you're not fair," Lethenard smiled. "You don't do yourself justice. Nor Monox neither." He turned. "The affair with Zouch, Charles. I believe that was your affair."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The squire broke his pipe and swore. Sir Charles swayed and was breathless. "Mine? Good God!"

"Oh, I have to remind you! When you found that Zouch was in the way, when he had settled down at Ashcombe and you couldn't persuade the lady to turn him out—it's a lady who develops affections for her guests—you asked me to deal with him. Well, I am used to be called on when you gentlemen are in trouble, the more fool me. I was ready to take a hand. You talked of what should be done with him. It was agreed between us that Sir William Zouch should have an accident on the road, be knocked on the head, or some such thing. Ah, I see you remember now. Well, Charles, it seems the squire don't like it. What are you going to do?"

Sir Charles was pale. His answer came slowly. "It is fair. I have to say, Izod, we did talk of contriving some accident to Zouch and Lethenard was to arrange it. I thought it necessary to the King's service."

The squire snarled something about a fool and grinned. "I reckon you didn't talk about murdering a girl, Monox?"

"Good God, no."

Lethenard shrugged. "Now you have it, squire. That was all I had to do in the affair with Zouch. Our design went no farther. The brute removed himself."

"Did he so? Who killed the girl, my lad?"

"Damme, sir, you heard the evidence. It was you committed him."

"Rot you," the squire roared, "you tried to get me into the dirty business. I'll not forget it. Evidence, my foot! I know your evidence now. Who is it in Cotswold uses the Wychwood gangs, my lad?"

"Would you have had a musket in Cotswold without them?"

"We wouldn't have had the parson's daughter murdered without 'em."

"What fool have you been listening to?" Lethenard cried.

"Burn your impudence, there's one fool here, Geoffrey Lethenard, and that's him that's too clever. You dirty dog! You go wring that poor girl's neck that was too kind to you and put it on old Zouch."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Lethenard shrugged. "You talk like a madman, squire." He turned to the others. "Pray, gentlemen, do you choose to hear this said against me?"

"There are others saying it, Lethenard," Monox answered.

"I protest I'll not believe it, sir," says Dr. King. "But as the thing has gone, we must have it out. I hope to God you'll clear yourself."

"Clear myself?" Lethenard laughed. "Against ravings? Will you show me how? I think I have done you some service, gentlemen. If you have any arms in the country, you may thank me for it. I have a right to expect you should trust me. And what is it the squire has against me? There was a jury sat on Jessie Marner: the squire was on the bench when they heard the case. Never a man on the jury nor the bench doubted that Zouch murdered her. What has become of the evidence? What have I to answer?"

The squire filled his pipe. The squire chuckled. "Aye, you're clever, my lad." He lit and puffed. "You didn't go into the box. You didn't tell us you had had Jess Marner with 'e at Stratford fair. You didn't say you had the Wychwood lads at Humble when she was throttled. You didn't say as 'twas a letter to you as you put in Zouch's traps."

"I put the letter—" Lethenard repeated—"a letter to me?" He burst out laughing. "Who told you this pretty tale?"

"I heard what I heard from them that has eyes. And I reckon I can put two and two together, my lad, old fool as I be."

"I have more enemies than I knew," said Lethenard quietly. "Come, if you believe this, you should be signing a warrant for me."

"Maybe I will yet," the squire chuckled.

"Mr. Izod, it is fortunate for you that you are an old man." Lethenard turned to the others. "Gentlemen, here is a foul invention to break up our party. I owe it to you to give my honour I know no more of the girl's murder than you know. I think you owe me something. Am I to call you friends?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"If you go on with him," the squire growled through his smoke, "you go without me, Monox."

"My dear squire!" Dr. King cried. "Mr. Lethenard has denied it all on his honour."

"His honour!" the old man chuckled. "If you go on with him there's not a gentleman in Cotswold goes with you. You can choose."

"Well, Charles?" Lethenard smiled.

Sir Charles stood up. "I dare not count private friendship, Lethenard. I believe on my soul you are wronged. But I must ask you to stand aside till the case is judged. I cannot endanger the King's cause for any man."

"God save the King!" Lethenard cried and flung out.

"Aye, aye, I'll ha' frightened him properly," the squire chuckled.

"You have lost us the help of a gallant gentleman," said Sir Charles. "I wish we may not suffer for it."

The squire blinked at him. "And which horse will you ride, Monox? You ha' quarrelled with him rather than quarrel with me. Now you want to quarrel with me because you ha' quarrelled with him. That's riding both at once."

Dr. King was alarmed. "For God's sake, let's make an end of this. Whatever he is, we are done with him. Faith, there is no place beside our Prince for a man that's blown upon. You are right, Mr. Izod. You have done the Prince shrewd service and he shall know it. But now we can go on in good heart. Forward is our word. Come, sir, give us your help. We need you more than ever."

"What's your will?" the squire grunted.

"It's time for action. Let us know whom you put first. Which are the men that Mr. Izod delights to honour?"

The squire called for wine, drank to them, drank to the Prince, drank to the cause, and had another bottle. But Dr. King wanted ink and paper. Dr. King wanted to do business. The best men in the county must meet the Prince and that quickly. They should be summoned to Ashcombe. The squire approved? The squire said it was a damned fine house and the girl (he chuckled) a damned fine woman and she could give them a damned good dinner. But who should they be? Who are the best men of Cots-

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

wold? Not too many must be asked lest the greater thought themselves cheapened, not too few lest men of weight were neglected. And all must be true blue, men who could be trusted, men of spirit, who would give a lead and not flinch. The squire put his mind to the matter and the list of these elect was made out. "Aye, there's none there I wouldn't trust with my own head," the old man nodded. "But I'll not answer for it will they venture theirs. A man won't go so far one day as he will another, do you see? And it's done ye harm, this affair with Zouch."

"Let them meet the Prince, he'll win them," says Dr. King. "There never was a man of spirit could resist him face to face."

"'Tis a fine lad surely," the squire agreed.

When they had met the Prince over the fleshpots of Ashcombe these great men must decide what they would do and when. But the doctor had no doubt. With them behind him, the Prince would hold an assembly of the county and before the month was out Cotswold would be up in arms. When Cotswold rose, he was assured, all the west would come out and the Welsh border and the north too. They would have half England on the march. Who could suppose Scotland would be quiet? The clans would come south again. Nothing could stand against it. German George must pack and go. Faith, the country would be lost and won before harvest and the Hanover rats back to their holes.

"Before harvest?" says the squire. "Ecod, that would be no harm either. But what's that you was saying about arms? I thought Geoffrey Lethenard had 'em. That wants looking to."

"There's a thousand stand of arms in the tithe barn at Humble," Monox said. "I have the rest."

The squire rubbed his chin. "The tithe barn? That's on Lethenard's land. The stuff shouldn't stay there. You don't want any tricks with it."

"Good God, sir, Lethenard is loyal to the cause, whatever he is. I don't doubt you have made him sore. But he is not the man to desert because he has been treated ill."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Ay, you thought you knew him before," the squire grunted.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Dr. King was alarmed at this renewal of strife. "We have done with Mr. Lethenard. As for the arms, Mr. Izod, I give you my word we'll take care of them. This is not the moment when any of us must fail in his duty." And he became eloquent and the squire opened another bottle and they parted in a glow of friendship and enthusiasm.

But when they were gone, Mr. Izod sank again into smoke and meditation. He was an old gentleman who liked to know more than his neighbours, and he had not told them all he knew. For he had heard that the matter of bail for Sir William Zouch had been taken to a judge in London and Sir William was out of prison. He thought it likely that the adventure of the Prince would be complicated by the resentful activities of Sir William, unless the adventure marched so fast that all private quarrels were overwhelmed by it. Mr. Izod wished it might be so, but he was not confident. He knew very well that many a gentleman who had been a hot Jacobite before the scandal of the murder was less than lukewarm. Some of them, to be sure, were glad of an excuse to cool off. But there were others heartily loyal to King James, disgusted by a plan which had need of a girl's murder, not in the least likely to be appeased by the casting out of Mr. Lethenard as a scapegoat. Mr. Izod could not hope much of the adventure. He was pledged to it, he had no notion of deserting. That was not possible to his temper. He must go on. He would encourage no man to go where he would not go himself. In his stubborn loyalty he had no pride : it was mere nature to him : he could as easily have felt proud of going on two legs. What he did take pride in was his shrewdness. He had a reputation in Cotswold for judgment, which was dearer to him than anything in life. He did not propose to lose that. Since he had to go on, go on he would, but he was resolved to risk no more than need be.

He grunted over his pipe. He was well aware that he had trouble before him. Not to leave his Prince in the lurch, poor lad, no fault of his he had been brought into such a mess : not to let that fool Monox lead them all to the scaffold

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

—and government men working the country over Zouch's damned case. It would need some riding. Ecod, though, it was never his way to jump a fence before he came to it. Nothing to do but go steady and keep his eyes open.

Two things to look out for. The Prince at Ashcombe, those damned muskets at Humble. There was nothing else a spy could use against them, nothing else that was evidence. But if Lethenard blabbed? If he tried to make his peace with Zouch by betraying the whole affair?

No. Mr. Izod, knowing in men, did not think it likely. He conceived that Lethenard was afraid of Zouch, and that Zouch would not choose to let him off. Zouch was no fool. He must know whom he had to thank. And, in his way, the fellow was a gentleman. "God! I hope I'll see him after the dog yet," the squire grinned. And knew in his heart that he was keener to have justice done on Lethenard than to strike for the Prince and King James. King James, yes, God bless him, he was the king for a gentleman. But that damned fellow Lethenard he had disgraced the county, he had betrayed his own class. Get a poor girl murdered and a girl on another man's land too—why, the thing befouled them all. Fellows in Oxfordshire would never have done jeering at Cotswold squires.

Yes, damn him, but what about the Prince and the muskets? Mr. Izod considered that his own lads could keep an eye on Ashcombe and let him know if any strange noses were smelling about it. But the muskets at Humble with Lethenard were more difficult. He pondered and he lumbered to his desk and with pain and heavy breathing wrote.

So it was the fate of Mr. Botynor, sitting over a supper of trout and strawberries, to receive a letter from the squire of Bourton. When he had given study to the large, chaotic script it seemed to mean something like this:

MY DEAR LAD,

This is to tell you I have not forgot what you was asking me. I reckon you could see I would not, which I wasn't minded to hide from you. I take it kind you came to me, Peter. You did ought to know you wasn't the only one which thought there was dirty work done. But I will say there was things you said which put me into looking into

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

things which I hadn't thought for. I do take it very handsome that you put it to me. And you be sure I won't fail for to use it right, Peter. Maybe you have heard there's been a lot of talk since and some honest gentlemen are very down swearing we will do no good now. And I don't say no, myself, and I promise you it isn't forgotten the girl was one of your people.

At this point Peter Botynor took breath. "Lord, he has a style!" he groaned. "He is as mysterious as a major prophet. What does the gentleman intend? He wants me to believe that I impress him very much and he is my good friend. I am mighty grateful, Mr. Izod. A glass of wine with you." But Mr. Izod had more to say.

It's none so easy going, Peter, as you do know, being as there's many things and persons which you wouldn't wish to have harmed yourself, you being, I do surely count on, all for your old friends though a careful fellow, which is what I like. I wouldn't need to tell you there was none of us had a notion what was doing till after, nor would have let it be. It was one man's work and I reckon you know who. We'll not forget it to him however things go, you be sure. And this is to tell you that we are done with him, which I hope you knew would be, Peter, when we knew. But things being how they are, makes blind country, and what I say is, don't rush your fences, but there it is, we will have trouble one way or another and you know what there is that he had. You won't be trusting the gentleman no more than what I do, and I reckon it would do very well if you gave an eye to you know what. Which, hoping you will oblige me, Peter, and all of us,

Your old friend,

JER. IZOD

My lady your sister was talking of you t'other day. She is counting to see you soon.

It was the postscript which extorted from Peter an angry laugh. "Confound the silly old fox," said he. It was unnecessary for Mr. Izod to remind him that his sister was involved in the Jacobite fortunes. He had no more

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

difficulty in understanding what Mr. Izod wanted. He was given a commission to see that Lethenard played no tricks and informed that the tricks probable would affect the you know what. The muskets in the tithe barn, of course. Those damned muskets which had brought Zouch into Humble and made all the mischief. But it was very difficult to understand what had happened to Lethenard. He was entreated to believe that Izod and his Jacobites had decided to hold Lethenard guilty of the murder. But apparently they had no intention of bringing him to trial. That would interfere with their confounded plans. They were content to quarrel with the murderer—if they had quarrelled—and let him go. Oh, honourable men! And how was Lethenard taking his expulsion from their noble company? It was left to Mr. Botynor to find out, it was left to Mr. Botynor to see that he did them no harm.

"By God, Mr. Izod, I am grateful! I am devilish grateful," said Peter, and lit that letter at a candle and watched it fall into ashes on his plate, and went cursing to bed.

A restless night brought no good counsel. Peter could not tell what it was right for him to do nor what was wise, and felt confident that what was right would not be wise. If the squire chose to cast off Lethenard with the Prince in Cotswold, with the hour of their adventure striking, he must be mighty sure of the fellow's guilt. And he would not want to be sure: and he was a shrewd old rogue and he knew the country better than any man. Peter remembered the hints of little Mr. Martin and his reluctance to believe them and his eagerness to put them out of his head. That would not do any more. He must make up his mind to think what he had fought against, think of Lethenard as a mean and brutal scoundrel, as the man who had to pay for the murder of Jessie Marner.

But what the devil was he to do? He had no more evidence than he had before. The squire himself might have none, only suspicions manifold and fortified. It would not serve to demand that the fellow should be put in the dock. There was nothing to bring into court. Pick a quarrel with him then and fight him? Why, it might come to that. It must come to that if nothing else could touch him. But Peter Botynor had no desire to cross swords

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

with a man who ought to die by the rope. He had his prejudices. Better avoid Mr. Lethenard.

Yet the squire was right. He must be watched. If these Jacobite gentry had turned against him he would not be apt to take it meekly. And they were mighty vulnerable. No wonder the squire was nervous about his cursed muskets. What if Lethenard chose to kill two birds with one stone, earn a pardon for the murder by betraying the Jacobite secrets and so enjoy a rich revenge? The man who had Jessie Marner murdered would be very capable of such a treachery. But, thank God, he would have his difficulties. He had gone very far to turn back. He could not suppose that the government would look upon him kindly. He must expect that Zouch would be working powerfully against him. Not an easy hand for Mr. Lethenard to play.

But the gentleman must be looked to. Peter went walking across the fields to Upper Humble. Ripening barley rustled in waves of pale gold, the grass was rising again after the hay, the turnips had been sown and were hardly breaking through the yellow ground. No work was waiting thereabouts and he met no one. The tithe barn, a noble great thing of mellow stone, old as the vanished abbeys of Cotswold, stood by the road to Stow. He sauntered by, stopped and stooped to shift a shoe buckle. The grey oak doors were padlocked. The dry earth before them was stamped deep with hoofs and feet which had come that way in the wet, and the ridges were unbroken and sharp. It was plain that no work had been done at the tithe barn for a long time. Peter sighed relief and strolled on towards Lethenard's house.

That building, once a grange of the abbey which owned the barn, had suffered from many hands. Somebody had built two stories on top of the old monks' work, somebody afterwards had found it too big for him and let it fall into decay, a third somebody had pulled down the ends to repair the middle, and he or another had cut down the timber of the park and ploughed up the turf. So Mr. Lethenard inhabited an ungainly place which stood up on the hillside tall and naked. Peter leaned on a field wall and surveyed it from afar. There was some activity in the paddock, he

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

could see Lethenard on horseback and others on foot. Lethenard rode away, the others drove into the farmyard a young bull. They seemed to be putting a ring in its nose.

Peter walked on with a shamefaced grin. To find Lethenard busy with these respectable agricultural occupations made him feel not only a fool but a spy. He shrugged, "Lord, it must be a dull trade. I shall never take to it." He saw Lethenard come out on the Buckle Street and ride away southward. "And the devil go with you," said Peter and turned into his own valley again.

But he had only come as far as his bailiff's house when he saw a little figure that seemed familiar. It was in a hurry, it vanished into the stable. Peter loitered and did not arrive till it came out again. It had a horse.

"Lord, here's Mr. Martin," Peter smiled. "Are you staying at Ridler's, Mr. Martin?"

Mr. Martin winked. "He likes a drop of good liquor as well as another, sir. Your hind, ain't he, Mr. Botynor? You got an honest man."

"Sir, you are very good to say so," Peter chuckled, being well aware that a hundred Mr. Martins would get nothing out of the stolid Jack Ridler. "Pray, have you seen anything of those fellows you were looking for?"

"Looking for, Mr. Botynor?" the little man stared. "I don't look for no trouble. I mind my business. Good day to you, sir." He sprang on his horse.

Peter held the bridle. "You're in a hurry?"

"Well, maybe I am. Your servant, Mr. Botynor."

"Riding down the Buckle Street, Mr. Martin? Burford way?"

Mr. Martin's sharp face puckered. "Anything I can do for you, sir?"

"I'd give something to know who stood in with those Wychwood rogues."

"Would you though?" said Mr. Martin and tapped his nose. "Well, I'll be jogging": and he jogged at a gallop.

And Peter went home not ill pleased. But it seemed to him that he also should give some attention to the journey of Mr. Lethenard on the Buckle Street. The fellow might not have gone to Wychwood. He might have gone to Ashcombe. Peter took horse.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

He saw none but honest men on the road ; he found Miss Lovel alone. At least he thought he had till he remarked the demure face of her maid looking round her skirts. Miss Lovel sat in an arm-chair reading, a stately sight ; her maid was on a stool at her feet almost concealed.

" Mr. Botynor is most welcome," says the lady.

" Mr. Botynor is very fortunate," says the gentleman.

" I think, sir, you know Kitty."

" Only enough to want to know her better." He bowed to Kitty and Kitty bowed to her embroidery.

" I may provide you opportunity," says the lady. " It is for you to use it."

Mr. Botynor sat down on Kitty's side of her. Kitty looked at him with a meek face and a laugh in her eyes and looked down. " I hope you have not forgot me, child."

" La, sir," says Kitty stitching fast, " I am not allowed to."

" It's a kind of a compliment."

Kitty looked sideways at her mistress. " Oh, yes, sir, indeed. It means madam has took notice of you."

" My dear ! " Mr. Botynor protested. " It shows that she thinks much of you."

" La, sir, madam likes to be amused."

" I hope we shall always amuse her, child. Let's endeavour."

" Oh, sir, your servant " ; Kitty made that little bow again and smiled at him frankly.

" I believe we'll do very well," said Peter and kissed her hand.

" Indeed, sir, madam's not hard to please," says she in a confidential whisper.

" Faith, child, I've found her the very devil," he confessed in her ear. " She is never twice the same."

" Didn't you know ? " says Kitty with round eyes. " She is a woman."

Peter glanced up at her. " I have sometimes thought she was," he confessed. " But what's to do ? "

" Go on thinking so," says Kitty. " Be kind, oh, be kind, sir," she picked up her little self and ran away.

Peter was left looking at Miss Lovel. " And I thought I was to play the fool," he said slowly.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Indeed you did very well," says the placid voice.

Peter shook his head. "'This can be no trick. This conference was sadly borne.'"

"Kitty is a good child," says the lady.

"I believe it. Pray, madam, how can I serve you?"

"Dear sir," the lady smiled, "hear a scrap of another play. You have an innocent, literal understanding."

"Why, what blunder have I made now?"

"None, oh, none. You are admirable. You are being kind, most gentlemanlike kind."

"I beg Miss Lovel's pardon."

"A long-suffering man, are not you?" she laughed.

"I am awkward company," said Peter. "I cannot come in tune with your humour."

"Oh, say I am sad because I am not merry. We are not all as light of heart as Mr. Botynor."

"I make you angry, madam. I can't tell why. I beg——"

"Not my pardon again for God's sake," she cried. "I am not angry, sir. I am anxious. My God, are not you?"

"Has anything happened?"

"Lord, no. Nothing happens. That is worst of all, to wait. I don't see my way, sir."

"I have not seen mine this long time," Peter said.

"What are you going to do when—when you have to choose?"

"When it all explodes? God knows." Peter shrugged. "I suppose I shall go with my friends."

"Mr. Botynor will follow. What do you want, Mr. Botynor?"

"Lord, I want peace, ma'am."

"Is it peace, Peter?" she laughed. "What have we to do with peace? What is to happen to this poor boy?"

"The Prince? God help him, I can't tell."

"Will they fight for him, Mr. Botynor?"

"How many have come to Ashcombe since he came?"

"I could count them on my fingers," she said slowly. "Oh, they came eagerly enough, your Jacobite gentlemen, when they came for me. But now that I have the Prince —no. They are cautious, peaceable gentlemen."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I come, madam," Peter said with a wry smile; "though you have the Prince."

"There are some asked to meet him here to-morrow. Will you come?"

"Miss Lovel honours me," he stood up and made his bow.

She looked up at him. "Yes. What is it Kitty said? Be kind, Mr. Botynor."

It was a melancholy gentleman who came back to Prior's Humble. A melancholy gentleman who rose in the morning to discover that Jack Ridler had seen no more of Mr. Martin and Mr. Lethenard had not come back home. A melancholy gentleman who rode again to Ashcombe.

He found a different scene. There were half-a-dozen fellows in her red and silver livery to open the door to him. The lady received him in the great hall, and both she and it were in splendour. The banners and armour of dead Fettiplaces and Lovels were a setting for the great pieces of silver and gold which they had gathered for the lady who was the crown of their endeavours. Her bosom shone out of a gown of state, the blue velvet caught between her breasts in a star of diamonds, many jewels flamed about her waist and on her arms, sapphires and pearls shone in the gold of her hair. The Prince was at her side, wherein Mr. Botynor gloomily confessed, she showed her wit, he did so well become her, he made her look no taller than a woman should be, or, if you please, he displayed her womanly magnificence, he was so much of a man. He was dressed to hold a court and the fine feathers made the most of his stature and strength. He had the grand manner, he looked royal by divine right. Mr. Botynor wondered sourly if he had dressed for the lady or himself, his blue and silver went so well with her and his own fair handsome face. Oh, a golden lad and a golden girl, God save their majesties.

They were gracious to Mr. Botynor, and he felt more than ever as if he had come to court. There was Charles Monox, to be sure, majestically solemn. The good man became more like the Blessed Martyr every day. Dr. King was still talking and saying nothing. And little Mr. Fettiplace put his head on one side and stood on one leg. Squire Izod had come in a huge wig of the last fashion but ten. He looked as sullen as a bull in a stall, but he had

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

come. Who else? The Mustoes were not here, nor Eltone nor Garstang. The squire rolled across the hall to Mr. Botynor. "Good boy, Peter," he growled. "You are the right stuff. You had a letter, eh? Seen anything?"

"It's quiet enough, squire. He has gone off somewhere."

The squire grunted. "Blind going, ain't it?" and turned away.

Mr. Fettiplace tripped up. "My dear friend, we see too little of you. It is kind in you to come now."

"Kind?" says Peter, remembering the lady's objection to his being that. "Lord no, sir, I am devilish proud to be let in."

Mr. Fettiplace looked round the hall. "Indeed you may be proud, Mr. Botynor," he said and sighed. "You have come."

"That's too hard for me, sir. What are you thinking?"

"I am thinking of a man who made a feast and bade many: and sent to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready: and they all with one consent began to make excuse. But you don't fail, Mr. Botynor." He laid his hand on Peter's arm.

The Prince was leading the lady out. Peter, lingering with Mr. Fettiplace, watched the company. It was scanty, to be sure, it was not imposing. The great men of Cotswold, save for Monox and the squire, were not there. Some of them had sent nephews, cousins, good fellows who had little of their own to lose and could not commit the head of the family. Some of them had sent no one.

They sat down to dinner at a glittering table rather too big for them. They were not merry. The Prince, between the sulky red face of Mr. Izod and the beauty of Miss Lovel, made vain attempts upon the gentleman and come back grave enough to the lady. Those two handsome heads were close and their talk was low and earnest. They drew Charles Monox in with them. And the squire was left sullen in vast eating and drinking, while Dr. King discoursed to him unbroken eloquence. No one else was at his ease. Talk spurted up in bursts about anything but what every man had in his head.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I wish you may never think what I am thinking now, Mr. Botynor," the old man's voice said softly.

"And what's that, sir?"

"That I have been at this very dinner many a time before. I am almost at the end of my manhood. And I end as I began."

Monox and the Prince were talking across the lady, Dr. King must lean over to put in his word. The squire was consulted and shook a sullen head. "Nought to do here," his growl was heard down the table. "Nought to do here."

The Prince laughed and shrugged and leaned back in his chair.

Monox started up. "King James, gentlemen, King James."

They got on their feet, they passed their glasses over the finger bowls. "The King," they said and drank, but they did not give him a name.

The lady looked round the table as they sank down in their chairs again, a cheerless company. She filled her glass, she rose, flushed a little, with bright angry eyes. "Will you drink with me, gentlemen?" she cried. "I drink the Prince."

There was no denying that, they stood up and made a show of heartiness.

"The Prince," says she, lifting her glass. "God send him happy: and damnation to all that fail him. Will you drink with me, gentlemen?"

A glass snapped somewhere but they drank it, calling on the Prince, who smiled and drank to his friends in Cotswold and settled down with them to serious drinking.

And a lady whose eyes were glistening swept from the room.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XX

AN OAK DOOR

MR. BOTYNOR conceived that he had no more to do at Ashcombe. He was a delicate drinker. After two bottles he lost interest in port. The squire was somewhere beyond the third but none the more pliant to the urgent arguments of Dr. King that all would yet be well, when Mr. Botynor asked for his horse.

It was plain to him that all would not be well. The thing would never march. Whether the good gentlemen who had been so eager were disgusted by Lethenard's trick, whether, when it came to the pinch, they did not like it as well as they thought they would, they meant to cry off. Riding home in the cool of the evening, Peter confessed that he was not sorry for it. But he cursed them heartily. They showed their sense, no doubt. He wished to God they had shown it before, before Charles Monox got it into his head that he was to be the general of a rebellion : at any rate before he set up his Prince with Susan Lovel. The thing would never march. But what was to be the end ? Charles Monox might charge a windmill. He was very capable of it. Call out his own tenantry, poor devils, arm and go to the devil, believing to the last that other men would be inspired to follow him. Dr. King was fool enough to believe it too. Yes. It might happen. Alas poor Dorcas ! But there was the squire. The squire would not have it if he could help it. The squire meant to save as much as he could. The Prince too : Peter did not think that the Prince had much hope left or would choose to go on a doomed enterprise. There was the lady. Her voice was still for war if her angry eyes told true. But she was incalculable. She might be for peace to-morrow. She might bid her Prince go and fight, she might refuse to let him run on such a risk. Whatever she wanted, she would

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

want it potently. A lady with the devil of a will. And plainly she had chosen to take him and his fortunes under her care. Oh, why the devil did Monox bring the fellow to Cotswold. Well, he had come to her. No use in cursing for that. She must know, she was shrewd enough, that in Cotswold she could do nothing for him. What would she do? Why, follow his cursed fortunes. The end of it, if he had luck, would see him safe out of England again. And Miss Lovel with him. A happy issue out of all afflictions.

Yes, if he had luck, he would get clear away and leave the fools who had been busy for him in Cotswold to pay for it. And if the luck was not with him he would be taken among them and they with him. A disastrous gentleman.

Peter Botynor rode up to his house and found Jack Ridler sitting in the porch. "Lord, what's the matter with you?" he groaned. Nothing was the matter. Ridler thought as he would like to hear Mr. Martin had not come back nor Mr. Lethenard neither, pulled his forelock and departed. "Oh Lord, how much does he know?" Peter stared after the broad back. "They are all damned close these days."

It was not till the next night that Mr. Martin came again to Prior's Humble. Peter was strolling in his garden in the dusk when he heard hoofs, and a husky voice asked for him. He came back to find Mr. Martin and a blown horse at the door. Mr. Martin, taken in to the light, was not the trim little fellow he knew. Mr. Martin's clothes were muddy, crumpled, torn, Mr. Martin's face a scrub of red bristles pierced through dirt.

"May I put you up, sir?" says Peter with cool sympathy.

"That's as may be," the little man grunted.

Peter opened his eyes. At least some supper for Mr. Martin?

"Mr. Botynor, sir, you wanted to know where Lethenard was going. Well, he went to Wychwood. He has brought some lads out of Wychwood and he has 'em away behind Bourton now. Now what's to do?"

Peter called for his horse and a fresh horse for Mr. Martin, and supper meanwhile.

"If you go to do anything, you mount every man o' yours," said Mr. Martin. "He has half a score. Hard bit rogues as ever I see."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

What he was going to do Peter did not well know, and he did not like taking orders from Mr. Martin; not openly: not as a matter of course. He settled the little man down with a tankard and a round and went out. There were four young fellows under his hand. He set them to boot and saddle and came back.

Mr. Martin grinned with his mouth full. "You don't show your hand, do you?"

"I don't know what's in it. Why do you come to me, Mr. Martin?"

"Your good health, Mr. Botynor." The little man winked behind the tankard. "You said there was guineas waiting." Peter provided five. But Mr. Martin let them lie on the table. "That's all right. You're a gentleman, Mr. Botynor. But what you going to do?"

"I rather believe that's my business, Mr. Martin."

"Fie, you know who I am," the little man winked.

"I suppose you also take an interest in Mr. Lethenard."

"Now don't be shy, I'm here for government. Who are you for?"

"I don't choose to have any more trouble in Cotswold from these Wychwood rogues. Is that enough for you?"

"That'll do," said Mr. Martin. "No more trouble, that's the word. I want evidence against Lethenard in that business of Sir William's. Did you hear Sir William's out, Mr. Botynor?" He cocked a knowing eye. "He ain't done for yet, you may lay to that. He's watching all right. But this is damned tricky country to work in. Now I don't know what Lethenard is at to-night. But I guess it's no good, and if I get some of his gang or him safe in a lockup that's good enough for me. Can you do it, Mr. Botynor?"

"I want to hang the man that murdered Jessie Marner. If you show me the way, I'll thank you."

"That'll do," said Mr. Martin and picked up the guineas. "Come on then. He was waiting for the dark but he's had time enough. Got your pistols?"

In the half dark of a moonless summer night they rode away by the green lane above the stream, two and two, not near each other, making little noise. The owls were hunting already. Lights in Battle village winked and went out. They came down to the Fosse Way by the ford above Bour-

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

ton and checked. The old road lay before them, a broad white line ruled across the dark. The river glimmered and murmured below dim heights, the steep broken slopes which stood darker than the darkness of the air.

"He was up there at dusk," said Mr. Martin. "Camping in a dell. This is his way, I guess. Keep close. We'll hear him on the hill-side."

"I wonder if you have brought me to the right ford."

"He wouldn't dare cross at Bourton."

"No. But he could at Harford."

"Oons, that's no way to his country."

"Do you watch here. I'll leave you Jack Ridler. I am for Harford."

Mr. Martin caught at his arm. "Wait," he muttered. "That's horses." Peter listened. There was a sound. It was faint and far away, but clear on the west wind the movement of mounted men. "By God, you're right," said Mr. Martin. "He's crossing up stream. What's the short way, sir?"

But Peter was gone. Peter was talking to Jack Ridler. "Be off to the squire. Rouse him out and tell him there's Wychwood rogues making for Ashcombe. Come on, lads." Peter turned his horse off and spurred up the hill to the Buckle Street.

Mr. Martin had hard riding to catch him. "What's the game, Mr. Botynor?"

"If we're in time, we'll find out."

"Ashcombe? That's where the heiress lives. Her that Sir William was after, ain't it? So it's her my gentleman's having a cut at? Well, I swear!" Mr. Martin chuckled as he rode. "I say, sir, I say: he's a gentleman I'm proud to be handling."

It was an emotion which Peter did not share. Whether Lethenard had come to kidnap the lady, which he doubted, or her Prince, which he thought likely, the affair was immeasurably dangerous with little Mr. Martin in it. But the worst of all would be that Lethenard should succeed. He must be stopped in time and the rest go as it would. Peter set so fierce a pace against the long slope that his men straggled out behind him and Mr. Martin who kept with him easily enough, riding some four stone lighter, called out,

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I say, sir, I say this hell for leather is no good. We'll come on 'em one and one, and all the horses blown if we——"

"Damn you, don't you want to catch them?"

"Catch 'em! They'll hear us coming and have hell waiting for us. Or be off and go to ground. Oons, Mr. Botynor, you don't know the game. Take a pull, sir, and let the lads close."

But Peter sent his horse on. He knew nothing of the tactics of man-catching, but he knew his hills. When he heard the distant sound of Lethenard's troop, he judged that they were already close on the upper ford; ride as hard as he could he saw no chance of cutting them off. The best he hoped for was to come down on them from behind before they got to Ashcombe.

And of that he failed. When he came to the copse at the high cross roads, he checked a moment to listen. There was no sound but the clatter of his own men. Away on the downs to northward a fox barked. The west wind brought nothing. They had crossed him, as he expected.

"My oath, they're away," Mr. Martin muttered. "Sure you come right, sir?"

Peter turned and galloped down the steep hill to Ashcombe and struck across the park. A light gleamed through the trees and was lost again. There was a crash and thudding blows, shots echoed across the valley, and between the shots thud upon thud.

Lethenard's gang had spread themselves about the great house and found its lower windows shuttered. The sound of horsemen alarmed Mr. Fettiplace as he lay in bed reading Ariosto, and he roused his servants and went to rouse the Prince who was already in his breeches. At the first stroke on the shutters the butler fired off his blunderbuss. It was rather a gesture of good will than an act of war. The bullets soared to the southern sky. The rogues below hammered on lustily. But the Prince, coming to a casement on the stair, fired his pistols into the brown of them and was rewarded. There were oaths and retreat and argument. It was not in the plan that they should be shot down by men who kept under cover. The thieves of Wychwood were not used to such shabby tactics.

But Lethenard brought them on again. Not one of them

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

was down. There was no one, they were well assured, to stand against them once they were in. The manor had a porch. In there no shots would reach them from above and they could break the door in safety. The rest would be as easy as drinking.

But the door was oak. They fired into the lock but bolts and hinges held and only groaned to their crowbars. The panels stood stout against hammer and foot. So they laboured in vain when the two who were holding their horses whistled loud and long. Some heard and ran out, some beat still at the door till they found themselves deserted.

So they were scurrying and mounting when Peter crashed into them and sent horses and men reeling. They did not rally, they scattered all ways in the gloom of the park. Not only Peter's men were coming up but another party from the other side. The lusty voice of Mr. Izod rose in a view halloa. Peter answered it. "Into 'em, lads, into 'em," Mr. Izod roared. "Break 'em up. Tear and eat 'em."

A shot rang out here and there. Here and there a man crashed down. Peter found himself bumping into the bulk of Mr. Izod. "Hey, Peter, good lad! What you got?"

"God knows. I think we have some of them, dead or alive."

"Lethenard's trick, ain't it? Got him?"

"I don't know, sir."

"If we're lucky, he's dead," the squire growled.

Mr. Martin reined up under his nose, panting, "Mr. Botynor? Oons, Mr. Botynor, this is the worst managed thing ever I see."

"What's your trouble, my lad?" says the squire.

"Ecod, where is Lethenard?" Mr. Martin cried.

"What, ain't he down?"

Mr. Martin laughed. "Not he. You got some small fry. He's broke through. He's off. What the hell did you look for with all your men spread out that way?"

"They're hunting yet, lad," says the squire. "They're hunting. You wait."

"Wait?" Mr. Martin gasped. "That beats all!" He dashed away into the dark.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Who is your little friend, Peter?" says the squire.

"It's the fellow that brought me the news Lethenard was coming with these rogues. He's been about Cotswold some while. Running brandy, he says. I believe he's here to smell into Zouch's case."

"Oons!" the squire muttered. "Do you reckon he's smelt out who there is at Ashcombe?"

"I believe not. It's Lethenard he has been set upon."

"Ay, that would be Zouch," the squire growled. "He'll not forget Geoffrey Lethenard. I'll back him for that."

"My little man thought Lethenard came here to carry off Miss Lovel."

The squire chuckled. "He's Zouch's man sure enough. Zouch and Lethenard they came near fighting over the wench before. I'll lay you Zouch thinks that it was to get her Lethenard had him put away. I reckon he is not far out neither. And I hope to God he goes on thinking so. Here, this won't do, though." He halload his men back. "What have we got?"

They had got, it appeared, when all were mustered, two prisoners damaged but alive, one dead. The squire had them tied on their own horses and carried off to the lockup at Bourton and detailed a party to patrol the park all night.

"There's no more to do, lad. Come, let's go up to the house and tell 'em all's well."

The house was now gleaming from many windows. The squire's lusty proclamation who he was opened the door in a hurry. He rolled in to behold Mr. Fettiplace in a loose gown twittering, and suffered himself to be led to the room where the Prince, in shirt and breeches, sat with a bottle of burgundy.

"What, Mr. Izod!" He stood up and shook hands. "You'll believe I am damned glad to see you. You are a friend to count on, sir. Faith, this was prettily done, Mr. Botynor. I am fortunate." He filled glasses and drank with them. "But who the devil are these rogues? Not King George's rogues, I think. They did not use his gracious name. Private rogues. My God, it is something new for me to have the law on my side. Pray, squire, shall I swear an information against them?"

"You'll not need, sir," says the squire stolidly. "I have

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

a brace of them, I'll know how to handle 'em. Ecod, sir, they're nought. Thieves and masterless men. They do come out o' Wychwood whiles. And this is a rich house."

"It is not for me, then?" the Prince shrugged. "I am not so important as I thought? So much the better."

There was a tap at the door. "Pray, sir, is it permitted?" a placid voice said. "Have I the entrée?"

The Prince looked at his legs. "Here's nothing to alarm Miss Lovel, I hope."

She swept in, a loose gown flowing about her, her hair in a cap. "Who are these knight-errants, sir? I beg leave to thank them. Mr. Izod—Mr. Botynor!"

It occurred to Peter that she need not have been so confoundedly surprised.

She made them a curtsey, she said something pretty.

"Don't you fear, ma'am, don't you fear," the squire patted her arm. "'Tis no more than a pack of thieves. We had word and we ha' schooled 'em. There's men of ours watching in the park. You sleep sound. All's well now."

When they were out in the dark again, "Is it, Mr. Izod?" said Peter.

"Is what what?" the squire stooped between the ground and saddle.

"Is it all well?"

The squire swung up. "Don't you jump your fences till you come to 'em," he said.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. IZOD ADMIRES HIMSELF

THE morning brought no news. The men who watched through the night in Ashcombe Park had not been disturbed. None of the gang had been seen since their rout. Lethenard had not ventured back home.

Such was the report Peter heard at breakfast from Jack Ridler. "And Mr. Martin, Jack?"

"I hears nought of he. There be a horse with a broken leg on Bourton hill, poor beast."

Peter smiled, being acquainted with the ways of Jack Ridler. "What do you make of Mr. Martin?"

"Sir? I don't rightly know he. He be a good little fellow seemly."

"What's he here for, Jack?"

"That be rare good liquor he has. I got a jar, sir."

"Oh, he really has brandy?"

"Sir? I reckon there's some of hisn all round about."

"The devil there is! And what do they all say about Mr. Martin?"

"I don't know as they say much, sir."

"You're all damned close these days, aren't you?"

Jack Ridler looked his master in the eye. "Seems like they don't know what's a-coming, sir."

"Well, no more do I."

"Maybe 'tis what they're feared on," said Jack Ridler.

Peter nodded and passed him the tankard and stood up. He had heard enough. He knew Jack Ridler, and Jack Ridler's slow smile said that he knew Mr. Botynor.

Peter rode off to the squire with troubled mind. It was no discovery that Jack Ridler and his kind had little zeal

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

for Jacobite ventures. Poor men had nothing to gain that way, whoever gained. King George or King James, what matter to them? The gentry might come to place and power. The poor fellows who did the fighting would have a good chance of death in arms, a very excellent chance of death by hanging, if they were lucky hard knocks for no pay. Why the devil should they march to please Charles Monox? Many of them would go to be sure, if their gentlemen called them, they were damned loyal, poor lads. The more obligation on the gentlemen to see them safe. Peter acknowledged it heartily and was determined to do his share. But it was going to be mighty awkward.

What was new was the light on Mr. Martin. If the little man had been telling everybody that they must look for a Jacobite rising and keep out of it, he was not only concerned to bring Lethenard to justice. He was playing a hand in the great game too, and he might have damned dangerous cards in his hand. He might have heard of Mr. Alexander. He might have found out who Mr. Alexander was. Where had he vanished to, then, and what had he gone to do?

These questions Peter did not put to the squire, for the reason that the squire put them first to him. Mr. Izod was making the round of the stables and his talk went in this manner: "Hey, Peter! Good boy. None of your cattle the worse? Ecod, I don't like this night work. How's your little friend? Look at the roan. There's three fingers of skin gone on his shoulder. You hain't seen him again? The mare's neat, eh? Not up to my weight though. D'ye care to give a price? You're laughing at me, you rogue. Come now, you'd look like a gentleman on her. But I swear that's queer. Where's he gone, eh? This is the best I got: old Bully Boy. Ah, you rogue." A handsome brown head turned and nuzzled him and bit at his pockets and ate sugar. "Damme, I wonder what he's at. Here's a good one too. I had him out in the big run when we killed in the church at Toddington. You wasn't out that day. No, you was on your travels. You missed something, my lad." They came out of the stable and the squire took Peter's arm. "So you don't know what your little rogue's doing, eh?"

"Not I. Likely enough he followed Lethenard."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"So it is. And what will we do if he catches him? Lethenard won't be hanged if he can help it. He'll peach on us all to save his neck. Rot him, he would peach if it didn't save him, for to hang us too."

"We have to hope he won't be taken alive," said Peter gloomily.

"He ran like a cur last night," the squire growled. "He's vermin, he is. I swear I always thought so."

"Faith, sir, I believe you should get the Prince out of the country."

"Don't I wish I could!" the squire grunted. "Ecod, I ain't his master. Well, let's do as we can. Here's these two rogues waiting for us. Come in, lad. I'll make something of them maybe."

Peter always found it easier to respect Mr. Izod's brains at a distance. He seemed that morning a very slow, puzzle-headed, fussy old fellow. Before he could act as a magistrate he had to put on another pair of boots, another coat, another wig, a huge grey wig, under which his red face looked like the sun breaking through mist. Thus arrayed, he established himself in his justice room, a large bare place all ancient oak and fusty, and when he was quite at his ease, a matter of much time and grunting, his old clerk was bidden have the rogues in.

They came between two lusty constables, looking small and helpless. "You be no Cotswold men," the squire growled and they met his frown with an impudent stare. They were slight men and blackavised, as like as brothers; on each sharp, thin face, under a tangle of dark hair, sprouted a dark beard. "Foresters," said the squire, and spat contempt. They looked wretched enough in their ragged, dirty clothes and one of them had a blood-stained bandage about his thigh and leaned on his fellow.

The old clerk asked their names. One of them said something indecent and the other capped it. The squire shook a quill at them and they laughed.

"Write it down they hide their names. 'Tis no matter," the squire said mildly. "They'll hang as well without."

One of them told him to hang his fleas.

The squire, still amiable, asked them what they were doing at Ashcombe.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Digging a badger," says one. "He grunted like you, billy."

"Burn him, it is th' old badger," says the other. "Look at the bristles to his head."

The squire was not troubled. "I would have thought you'd be doing no more with Geoffrey Lethenard," he said. "But, ecod! I don't grumble. It's neat work to get you so. Draw the charge, Ned." He leaned over to the clerk and muttered.

Peter saw them glance at each other sidelong.

"That'll do for you, my bullies," the squire looked up and smiled at them.

"What will?" one said. "You speak out. You tell us what you got against us."

"Hey! You've found your tongue now. It's over late. Next court day at Stow, Ned," the squire nodded to the clerk, who gave him up a paper. "Ay, that'll do their business."

"What you holding us for? You ben't treating us right. You be bound to tell us what you got against us."

The squire burst out laughing. "That's good, I swear. You teach me law, will you? I take it very kind. You and your rights, ecod! You don't know what you've done! You're here for murder."

And again Peter saw the eyes go sideways.

"That's a dirty lie," one cried and the other licked his lips. "There was no one killed but one of ours."

"Talking o' last night, are you?" said the squire with careless contempt.

"What d'you mean, then, master?"

"Last night—that's all right. Geoffrey Lethenard brought you into a trap. More fools you. But I'm devilish obliged to him. I ha' wanted you this month gone."

"I swear we done nought," the voice went high. They drew together as if each found comfort in feeling the other. "What you got against us, squire? We never done no harm in Cotswold."

"You was in Cotswold last June. First o' June. Camping on the Buckle Street."

"Swear to God I wasn't. No, nor Jake neither. It's a lie, squire. God love you, it's a lie."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"You'll find them that'll do all the swearing you want," the squire was loud and harsh. "You murdered Jessie Marner to Humble."

"God love you, squire, it was the London gentleman and you gaoled him for it."

"He's out of gaol. Rot you, don't you think to put it on him. That was what Lethenard tried. That cock won't fight."

The spokesman of the two stood silent, plucking at his clothes. The other looked at him anxiously and whined. "It ain't right, so help me God, it ain't. We wasn't in it. Not Joe nor me."

"You was seen," the squire growled: and affected to read from the paper. "Jacob and Joseph Lee: charged with the murder of Jessie Marner first o' June by Upper Humble."

The two breathed hard and flinched from his pale and choleric eye. Then the weaker broke. "What you want to hate us for?" Jacob whined. "Don't 'e put it on us, master. We wasn't alone." And Jacob swore at him.

The squire laughed. "I reckon not. But I got you. And you'll swing."

"It ain't right," Jacob moaned. "We didn't go for to hurt the girl. We was to put her away in Wychwood. 'Twas Mr. Lethenard said to wring her neck. And it wasn't me did it neither, it——"

"You rat," Joseph cried. "Don't you hear him, squire. I'll tell 'e how it was——"

And so between them the brethren told the tale and the old clerk's pen scratched. Lethenard had brought a party of them out of Wychwood to kidnap (so they said) a girl who was plaguing him. The job was worth ten pounds and they could have her for their pains. When he had got them out on the Buckle Street he changed his tune. The girl must be put to sleep and they could have twenty pounds for it and no danger. He sent one of them to steal something of Zouch's from the Ashcombe laundry. He met the girl and held her in talk till he brought her where they were posted. And among them she was strangled. They swore their own hands had not touched her, and it was Lethenard who made

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

sure she was dead and rammed Zouch's handkerchief into her mouth.

"Ye filthy rogues," said the squire and spat. "Take 'em away, lads, take 'em out."

"I swear to God it's true, master," Jacob whined. "You got it all now. You won't be hard on poor men, will 'e."

"I'll hold you, by God," the squire growled. "Take 'em away." And when the constables had dragged them out, "Faugh, that's foul," he said, but he grinned. "I reckon I schooled 'em proper, lad. Ecod, there's no man in Cotswold would ha' got that out but old Jerry Izod."

"Dirty work, sir," Peter said.

"D'you mind dirtying your hands with a bit of work?" the squire chuckled. "Neat! Damned neat! Me that didn't know 'em from Adam nor their ugly names neither! Ha, we got it all now."

"And what will you do with it?"

"Hold 'em!" Mr. Izod winked.

"That's not law, is it squire?"

"Hell!" said the justice of the peace. "What do they know about law? Come to dinner."

His saddle of mutton, his shoulder of veal, his chicken pie were even as good as he boasted them, and there was no denying the mellow charm of his old ale. He ate and drank for two and was in boisterous spirits. A queer old fellow, Peter thought, as he did his best with an overloaded plate: devilish cunning, it was proved, at a pinch, and of a cool, sound judgment when he chose to look ahead. But he was bragging over his cunning with these two wretched rogues as if he had made an end of all the trouble.

"It's very well, sir," Peter cried, "but I can't tell how we are better off. They are no evidence against themselves. They might be evidence against Lethenard. But we haven't got him. And if we had, would you dare use them? He could tell a tale too. What the devil can you do with them?"

"Hold 'em, boy, hold 'em and keep a still tongue," the squire chuckled. "It's damned useful to know something that fellows don't know you know." And he went on bragging. What a stroke it was to call them by the name of Lee! Did Peter see how he got that? They were

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

gipsy rogues. Call 'em by a gipsy name then. If it wasn't right they would quarrel and blab who they really were. If it was, they would think—as they did think—he knew all about them. And telling them they had been seen! To be sure no fellow knew their dirty faces. But that broke 'em. They couldn't tell but they might ha' been seen. Neat, damned neat! Peter was to remark that he could carry if off too. Gipsy rogues had been noticed on the Buckle Street. The squire would find half a dozen honest lads, if he wanted 'em, to swear these two were there. The gipsy dogs were all alike. "A great game, a great game, lad. What'll you have? A bit o' the pickled tongue'll set you going again. What, you're for the port already? Well, here's hell to Geoffrey Lethenard. What the devil's this?"

It was the noise of a galloping horse, it was a loud, breathless voice asking for the squire, it was young Jim Blaket dusty, foam-flecked and red, banging the door to behind him. "Mr. Izod, there's soldiers coming on us. Dragoons from Oxford. A pack of 'em."

The squire's mouth fell open.

"This is the real affair," said Peter. "Where did you see them, Jim?"

"Coming up from Burford. And, what's worst, there's that dog Lethenard riding with their captain."

Then the squire said heavily, "Ecod! he's done it," and his head sank between his shoulders.

"Pray, sir, let's warn them at Ashcombe," Peter cried.

"That's right," the squire nodded. "You be off, Jim. Tell 'em. See him if you can. See the girl. Tell 'em. Ride like hell."

"Trust me, sir," Mr. Blaket made off.

"Tell him to go west, Jim. Make for Gloucester or Berkeley," Peter said at the door.

"A good lad, a good lad," the squire rumbled. "Ecod, it'll be a close run thing."

"Won't you get to horse, sir?" says Peter, having already called for horses.

"What the hell can I do?"

"We have to hold them off."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"God, we can't fight 'em, lad," the squire groaned. "You and me and the grooms!"

"And the constables, sir."

"Are you mad?"

"They can stop Lethenard. You have your evidence. Write a warrant, sir, and go out with your constables and take him."

The squire slapped his hand on the table. "Oons, that's the game," he roared. "You've a head, you have, Peter. That protects us, don't it?"

"God knows," Peter said. "It will hold them up while Jim Blaket gets to Ashcombe.

"That's it. That's right," the squire lumbered out, roaring for his clerk.

It took some time to get his posse together, but the old man kept good cattle and he brought them along at a cracking pace. They were at the cross-roads in the valley under Stow in time to see the dragoons on the long hill by which the Burford road comes down, a troop at the trot.

"Good and well," said the squire and stopped. "Can you make him out, Peter? Ay, there's a dark coat among the red, the dog. We'll hold 'em up here."

"Ride on, sir, ride on. You are not looking for dragoons. You know nothing about them. You are leading your men into Wychwood to take Lethenard."

"You've a head," the squire growled and set off again at a brisk pace and soon they were close upon the red coats. The captain of the troop shouted to them to give way. The squire lifted his whip hand and drew into the side of the road; then roared out an oath.

"There's my man. By your leave, sir." He swung his horse out across their front. "Hold your horses! Stand, in the King's name." And his faithful constables followed him.

"What the devil is this?" says the captain and called a halt, and indeed they could only pass by riding down Mr. Izod and all his posse. "Who are you, sir?"

"Justice Izod of Bourton. And I am out hunting for a man that's done murder. And by God, sir, you ha' got him there behind you. Come out, Geoffrey Lethenard. We ha' done your business at last. Close on him, lads."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

And the constables of Bourton, showing their painted staves, edged forward.

"Murder?" says the captain. "D'ye mean there's a warrant out for him?"

"Ecod! there is," Mr. Izod plucked it out and thrust it under his nose. "Murder of Jessie Marner to Humble."

And Peter Botynor, making no show about it, turned his horse from the road, slid down the bank, and vanished.

"It's in order, I believe," the captain frowned. "Murder, eh?"

"Murder?" Lethenard laughed. "Damme, Vincent, don't you see he's fooling you? He wants to hold you here while the Prince makes off."

"Prince?" Mr. Izod gaped. "Prince who? Ecod, that's good, that is. All right, sir, you go look for his Prince and I'll keep Mr. Lethenard safe for you till you come back. Reckon you'll know him better then. I reckon you'll have a word to say to him. Telling you tales to get you officers to stand for him! Prince!" Mr. Izod laughed long and loud. "I swear that's the best he's done yet. Prince! You go find his Prince, sir. And eat him when you find him. And when you come back you look in at Bourton lockup. You'll be glad to see Geoffrey Lethenard again."

Lethenard was talking long before he had done. "My God, Vincent, will you stand here all day listening to this old fool? While he talks the Prince will be off and away. That is what he's here for."

Captain Vincent looked at him without affection and looked at the warrant. "He wants you for murder," he said slowly.

"Yes, for the murder of Jessie Marner. Zouch is in gaol for murdering her already, and this old fellow is the man that sent him there. Damme, don't you see? These damned Jacobites use that murder to lock up any fellow that knows too much. Izod is the leader of them. This is a cheat to put you off while they got the Prince into hiding."

"Lots of lies in that, ain't there, Lethenard?" the squire grinned. "Sir William Zouch he's not in gaol. He only got there by your tricks. He——"

"By God, Vincent, if you wait for more of this, I swear it's your blame you lose the Prince."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The squire slapped his broad thigh. "Ecod, that's best of all. He'll blame it on you, captain! Well, I be damned."

Captain Vincent made up his mind. "You swear what you please," he said to Lethenard. "Mr. Izod! I want this fellow on the King's service. He's my guide. I must take him on. I'll hold him, I promise you. You can have him when I've done with him. Here's your warrant, sir. Draw off, if you please." He saluted, the squire touched his hat and the troop clattered off.

"Neat work," the squire chuckled, "neat work. That's done a bit o' good. Ecod, there's none of 'em can live with me when it's a stiff bit o' country," and he slapped his thigh and made off to Charles Monox to make him burn all his papers.

Some way down the Burford Road, a little man who had been leading his horse got into the saddle again.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XXII

MISS LOVEL ORDERS HER HORSE

MR. FETTIPLACE was uncomfortable. The leaves of his Lucian fluttered. He looked over the top of the book and sighed and came back to a page about statues, and was disconcerted, for he thought he was reading about philosophers. And again he looked across the room. Susan Lovel was disposed upon a couch with a portfolio of French prints, and her Prince looked at them over her admirable shoulder or at her shoulder instead of the prints. Mr. Fettiplace had seen her put back her head and discover his eyes making free with her and give him no denial. He could not hear what she said.

"Sir, your thoughts are somewhere else," she laid the prints aside.

"All that I have is here."

"It is not the Prince who says so."

"Faith, it is true whoever says it. You know that, Susan."

"I will not believe it," the placid voice said and went on not so placid: "I know you have been vilely served. These good gentlemen who promised so much to bring you into danger—oh, you are right to despise them."

"Not I," he laughed. "I have seen too many. It was to be the grand affair. It will end in nothing. Well, I am used to it."

"But this is not the end. You have a thousand things to do in your life yet."

"My God, I have done a thousand things. And what use? I go on without a friend."

"I am ashamed that you say so."

"You know it is true. These fellows in Cotswold, they

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

shun me as if I had the plague." He shrugged. "Poor devils, small blame to them. I ruin who touches me, child."

She lifted her head. "Sir, we have not been afraid of you at Ashcombe."

"Faith, I am a rogue to stay. But it is as I said. All I have is here."

"The Prince must not think so."

"Prince?" he laughed. "Let the Prince take care of the Prince. He has brought me no good. I am a man and I want a life of my own. Lord, what is the Prince to you? It is a name that will never mean anything in a thousand years."

"It is a faith, sir," she cried.

"What's faith? A dream that you wake from. They waked in England long ago. Well, I am awake at last."

"It is something that men will die for."

He laughed. "Well, they show no desire."

"Men have died for it—and for you."

The long face hardened. "My God, do you think I forget them? I call no more men to march for a lost cause. The Prince is dead. But I have my life to live, Susan."

Mr. Fettiplace, who had been fidgeting more and more as their voices fell lower, found that he had come to the limits of his endurance. He started up and announced that he had heard something. Had they not heard it? He went out by the window and came back and went out again, describing his sensations. And the long face scowled at him and the lady lay back and watched him with kindly pity, and in time he did hear something. He heard Mr. Blaket.

Mr. Blaket burst in on them. "Madam, I ask pardon. Your servant, sir. Here's the dragoons from Oxford coming, It's Mr. Izod sent me. You'll be taken if you stay, sir. They're close on me, I believe. And Lethenard's with them. You should ride hard. Mr. Botynor said to make for Gloucester or Berkeley." Miss Lovel swept out of the room.

"Pray, Mr. Fettiplace order my horse," the Prince said quietly. "Sir, I am obliged to you. How long do you give me?"

"Lord, there is no time for anything. You must mount

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

and go." Mr. Blaket looked at him uncomfortably. "It's as near as nothing as it is."

"Sir, sir," Mr. Fettiplace twittered, "there is a safe place here, where you may lie hid for a year and none will find you, a chamber behind the chimney."

"A priest's hole? I thank you, not I."

"Oh, sir, how can we let you go in such danger? I promise you, it's secret. Father Davis lay there in the old days and the house was searched from chimney to cellar again and again. He was hidden a month, and my great-grandfather fed him with milk, which he sucked up by a straw."

"Taking his food like a snipe!" the Prince laughed. "My God, no. I'll not go to ground. They can pull me down in the open. Order my horse, sir. Will you be so good?" Mr. Fettiplace bustled out. Mr. Blaket was at the window. "Pray, sir, shall I have your company?"

Mr. Blaket looked at his feet. "I beg pardon, sir, I believe I should see what they are doing. Monox should have word, if I can get to him. There's others too. You see, sir, it's that damned fellow Lethenard. He knows enough to hang half the county. I should be off, I think. By your leave, sir." He edged his way out and heard a laugh as he went.

The Prince, crossing the hall, met Mr. Fettiplace again. "Pray sir, consider——" the old man twittered.

"Let me be, I must do as I can," the Prince hurried on to his room. When he came down again, booted and cloaked, the old man was still where he had been left, shrunk upon himself and miserable. He did not speak. The Prince waved a hand at him and hurried out.

Miss Lovel was at the door mounting her chestnut mare. She rode on before he was in the saddle.

He galloped after her. "Susan! You are divine!" he laughed.

She looked at him. "Do not talk," she said fiercely. "Draw back. Let me go first. The soldiers may be here already. Oh, be silent. They will not hurt me."

So she rode on a hundred yards ahead till they came to the park gates. The road was empty. She waved her hand and turned west.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

In a moment he was up with her. "My God, I was afraid."

"Afraid?" her eyes were curious.

"Afraid you were a good hostess seeing me to your gate—and then good-bye."

"I thank you, sir."

"Call me a fool who cannot believe in my fortune. Call me a rogue to doubt you. My God, we are riding together."

"Yes, sir," she said. "I suppose you don't know your way."

"What do I care for the way? You are with me."

"Mr. Blaket said Gloucester, I believe, sir?"

"Mr. Blaket said Mr. Botynor said—and Mr. Botynor stayed away and Mr. Botynor didn't choose to come. And Mr. Fettiplace bade me go into a priest's hole and suck up my food like a snipe. And I'm damned grateful to them all, good, cautious gentlemen."

"Ah, that is well said!" she cried. "My grandfather would have borne anything for you."

"God bless him, he is loyal. But these other careful souls!" He laughed. "Oh, I thank heaven for them."

"You are generous, sir."

"Why, I love all the world, my dear. And you—have you ever had a better hour than this?"

"Oh, must you talk?" she cried. "Ride, ride for your life."

"And yours," he said, and they dashed on.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. BOTYNOR GOES RIDING

SOMETHING about this time Peter Botynor was coming across the park to Ashcombe. He saw a single horseman making off to the north, and by his shape knew him for Mr. Blaket, and by his direction that he meant to do no more. "I don't blame him," Peter muttered as he held on towards the house.

Some of the servants were out by the door staring and chattering. "Why, what's the matter?" says he as he dismounted.

"Oh, sir, have you seen them?" Kitty cried. "Is it true, they're coming?"

"Seen who, child?"

"La, sir, the soldiers."

"What the devil have you to do with soldiers?"

The company shrunk away. "I beg pardon, sir," the butler quavered, "shall I tell Mr. Fettiplace——"

Peter made an impatient gesture and strode in. "Sir," says Kitty tripping behind him, "Sir, my mistress is gone with Mr. Alexander."

Peter started round and caught her arm. She was never frightened of Mr. Botynor, she liked his angry grip and his agitation. "Alone? On horseback?"

"Yes, sir, indeed. But they're none so far yet, Mr. Botynor. On the Gloucester road. You could catch them, I vow." Her eyes said that she was all for Mr. Botynor.

But Peter did not go. "The road, eh? Hold your tongue," he frowned. "Kitty, can you ride?"

"Me, sir? La, yes, sir."

"Get into a cloak of Miss Lovel's and come with me. Quick." She ran on and he made for the stables. "Put

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

a side-saddle on a lady's horse. Another chestnut if you have it. Quick, lads, I'm waiting."

He went back to the house. Mr. Fettiplace, holding by the butler's arm, stood at the door and peered about him with wondering eyes. "Ah, you. It is you, then," he said. "My dear lad, she is gone. He has taken her."

"I have heard, sir," Peter said gently. And set a determined eye on the butler. "Miss Lovel is gone riding with Mr. Alexander. They went up the park, over the hill."

"No, no," the old man said, "that's not right——"

"Yes, sir," the butler agreed eagerly. "Over the hill. Worcester way."

"You have it. That's all you know, my friend, and you all know it, and no one knows anything else."

Kitty ran out in a blue cloak of Miss Lovel's, and the chestnut horse was led to the door. "Now, child," Peter swung her up. "Faith, that's brave. Come on with you. Now we're Miss Lovel and Mr. Alexander."

Kitty laughed. "La, sir, I wish we were," she said. "Pray what would you do with me, Mr. Botynor?"

"You shall come to no harm, child."

And Kitty looked at him and laughed again.

But the gentleman was not attending to Kitty. He set a good pace; he chose the open ground, he rode with his head over his shoulder. It seemed to him that the dragoons were due and something more. He wanted to be well away from them but not too far. Old Izod had done vastly well to hold them so long. Or the thing might have gone amiss; they might have got word of the two on the Gloucester road and gone straight after them. A silly thing to take the road. The man should know better than that if she did not. Both of them crazy. Then he heard a clatter of cavalry. He saw a flash of red.

"Thank God. Ease your horse, child. We'll need him yet. Take the hill quietly."

"What's to do, sir?"

"We'll show these clever fellows a sight of us. Enough for them to be sure we are the Prince and your lady. Then we'll give them the devil of a run. And in a while

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

you'll turn off and drop down to Humble, and bid Jack Ridler take care of you while I draw them on after me."

"La, sir, what will become of you?"

"Nothing. Never fear, there's nothing they can do to me nor you neither. It's no sin to go riding in couples."

"La, no, sir," says Kitty.

Peter checked his horse to a walk. The dragoons were at the house and halted. He was anxious, for all his precise prophecies, what they might do next. He had no confidence in himself. The butler was a shrewd, honest fellow, but he might muddle his story. Lethenard, if Lethenard was still with them, might see through it. Peter could not tell how, he went over it again and could find no flaw, but he had a dread of Lethenard's wits. It was the misfortune of Mr. Botynor throughout his life to feel great respect for the abilities of others.

And he was not in this matter altogether wrong. Lethenard did suspect the story, but his suspicions had not the effect which Peter feared. When the dragoons came to the house, Captain Vincent made them surround it (at which formality of caution Lethenard shrugged) before he demanded admittance. There was no trouble about that. The butler had the door open waiting for him. Captain Vincent said that he wanted the Pretender—the butler begged pardon—wanted Prince Charles—the butler shook his head and was told not to play tricks. Was there no gentleman in the house? To be sure, there was Mr. Fettiplace.

"Here, you, Lethenard, what's the damned name you talk of? Alexander? Take me to Mr. Alexander, my man."

The butler's puzzled face cleared. Oh, Mr. Alexander? But Mr. Alexander was out riding.

Lethenard laughed and Captain Vincent swore at him. "Expected that, did you?"

"Didn't you, captain? How long has he been out, Benson?"

The butler could not say. Some while since. No, indeed, not alone. With Miss Lovel. Which way did they go? Up the park. Over the hill, Worcester way.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Damme, you have it pat," said Lethenard. "Sure of it, are you? What's madam riding?"

The butler was still glib. Mistress had her blue cloak and she was on her chestnut mare. Mr. Alexander was riding his grey. He could point out the way they went, and did.

Captain Vincent shouted to his men and turned away, but Lethenard held his arm. "Lord, man, you don't believe all that?" he laughed. "He has learnt it like a lesson. Search the house." The captain damned his impudence and was not to take orders from him. "Take orders from the devil," Lethenard said. "I want the fellow caught. Don't you? If you go on this wild-goose chase it's letting him slip through your fingers." The captain scowled at him and said something about too clever by half, and strode into the house, calling some of his men. Lethenard followed.

"What, you want to come?" the captain turned on him. "You were a friend of these people, weren't you? My God!"

And for once Lethenard had no answer. He saw, sitting in a corner of the hall, Mr. Fettiplace, and Mr. Fettiplace looked at him with wondering eyes, a little shrunken old man, who seemed to ask how he could be alive. He hurried on from room to room.

Neither the captain nor his men liked the work. Their search was hurried and careless, they were down again while Lethenard was still busy. "Where the devil is the fellow?" Vincent cried. "You, Lethenard, come down with you."

"Oons, sir, he do work like a li'l' stinking ferret," his sergeant chuckled as Lethenard swung down stairs.

"Look to him, he's tricky," Vincent said. "Come on, my friend, you have lost us time enough. Damn you, we should have been up with them by now."

"Send a party on the Gloucester road, sir. He'll break for the west," Lethenard said.

And then Captain Vincent let himself go. For a dirty, foul rogue of a cut-throat, Lethenard was the most impudent dog that ever dodged the devil. All this and much more. And in that storm of abuse they rode on the

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

way the butler sent them, up the park and over the hill.

Peter and Kitty were still there, walking their horses along the level ridge below the summit, waiting, watching. The business at the house had taken some time and Peter was impatient. Every minute of delay must give Susan and her Prince a longer start, but if the delay meant that Lethenard was dragging the truth out of the poor souls in her house, a long start would not save them. Lethenard and his dragoons harrying Mr. Fettiplace—an ugly notion. But what the devil were they at? The sun was low and still they hung about the house. And Peter felt wofully ineffectual, and Kitty would not be serious. Lord, it was the devil of a business to do nothing when every one else was at strain. Probably all he was fit for. Probably he had bungled everything. But what in the world should he have done?

So he was fretting and Kitty poking fun at him when he heard the dragoons in movement. He stopped and stared. "La, sir, won't you be off now?" says Kitty.

"Wait a while. Yes, they've taken my word for it. God bless them. They're after us, every man. Come, child, ride close by me."

"But what are you doing, sir?" she cried, for he turned his horse and rode back along the ridge at an easy pace.

"We'll show them their fox, Kitty," he laughed.

So Captain Vincent, going hard across the park, saw a man and a woman riding on the hill above him. They had no eyes for him and his dragoons, they were as close to each other as they could be, a pleasant, affecting sight. They came out on the summit into the last of the sunlight and it fell on a grey horse, a chestnut and a blue cloak. "Damme, we have them," the captain cried. "Forward, lads, forward."

The two on the skyline checked a moment, glanced back, saw the red-coats, and dashed away over the hilltop and vanished.

"Easy now, child," Peter said, "they've a climb that will take the speed out of them. They ride heavy, these soldiers and their cattle are not fresh."

He held on over open down, good galloping ground, long waves of turf unbroken by scrub or tree, but he would

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

not let his horse out. It was long before the first red-coat came over the hilltop and they were well away towards the woods that filled the little combes at the head of the eastern valley. A shout pursued them. Peter looked back and rode the faster. The dragoons were strung out on a long line and some of them visibly failing. But Vincent had a dozen men together and among them Peter saw Lethenard's dark coat.

There was talk among them. They seemed to be at odds. The indomitable Lethenard wanted them brought into line across the down so that the fugitives should not break away to the west, which, he declared, they must intend. Captain Vincent was in no temper to take the soundest tactics from him. "Scatter?" he roared. "What, so that you can be off and away? Hold your damned tongue! Sergeant! If this fellow tries to go off cut him down."

"It's not me you'll lose, sir," Lethenard cried. "It's the Prince there. And you'll stand the blame, I'll see to it."

"You ——" Vincent swore at him. "If you had not played the fool at the house, I would have had him already. You dog, I believe you played the trick to get him safe off. I have you, though, and I'll hold you for the old fellow that's to hang you."

The last of the sun was going. The edge of the right rim sank into black cloud and the gold faded out of the western sky. The two fugitives had been gaining through a long mile of chase and were well away, still clearly seen when they rose on the crests of the waves of the down. They and their horses had no colour, nothing individual, they were only a man and a woman riding in flight. And close before them was the darkness of the woods in the eastern valley.

"Look, child," Peter ranged alongside her. "We'll race to the dip there. Then you swing right into the wood and down the combe and away to Humble. Bid Jack take good care of you. God bless you, you've done well."

"Oh, sir," she panted, "oh, Mr. Botynor."

They were down out of sight of the dragoons. "Off with you," Peter pointed. She waved her hand and swung away into the wood and vanished. Peter turned up the

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

hill, and so when the dragoons saw him again, he was off on their left flank; he was alone.

"Damme, Vincent, what did I tell you? He's breaking for the west," Lethenard cried.

"What has he done with the girl? Is she down?" Vincent stood in his stirrups.

"To hell with the girl. You want him, don't you?"

They bore away to follow him and, cutting off some of the corners he had made, gained ground. His horse, too, was going badly and they closed him fast. Again Vincent challenged him, but he did not check or look. "He's game, egad," Vincent muttered. "D'ye mark that, Mr. Lethenard, this fellow's game."

Lethenard did not answer. He was puzzled. He could make nothing of the line the fellow was taking. Good going, to be sure, but as good for the heavy-laden dragoon horses as him. There was woodland and valley where he might have lost them. But he chose to keep where he could never lose them. Now he was swinging west, to be sure, but many a mile too late. What the devil was he making for? He might hope to hold out till dark, but he would be near nowhere with a spent horse. He didn't know the country? He was a fool? But Susan Lovel knew it and she was no fool, and she had been with him. Mr. Lethenard damned them both.

Dusk gathered about them. The fugitive not far ahead was seen like a shadow in the misty gloom and the dragoons were going heavily, spurring hard at horses that could do no more. The air came cold and dank. They were out on a level upland where the stone broke through the turf, and failing horses stumbled and struck sparks in the mist.

Suddenly Lethenard checked his horse, and shouted, but what no one knew. The sergeant crashed into him, cursing him, and rode him down, and men and horses vanished with a roar of falling stones and a mighty splashing. Not Lethenard and the sergeant alone. They were all down.

On the upland there the headwaters of a little stream were dammed to make a pool for sheepwashing. Into the wall that guarded it the dragoons crashed and some went

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

headlong into the pool, some lay in the writhing heap of horses and men about the wall.

Peter stopped in the dark to listen and was satisfied. "I think you will do no more to-night, Mr. Lethenard," said he with a chuckle and, going easily, rode down to the river and the Gloucester road.

Mr. Lethenard was to do no more that night or any night. He had found the answer to his puzzling why the fugitive took that line, and perhaps to some other puzzles. When Captain Vincent, dripping, furious and profane, got his dragoons in some order again he had the luck to find a little man who showed him the way down to shelter at Guiting. But there were horses which had to be killed and men who could not move. In the night, helpless where he lay in the mist and the dew, unconscious, Lethenard gave up the last of his life.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XXIV

BROTHER AND SISTER

SO to Miss Lovel and her Prince came no alarm of pursuit. But the lady was earnest, and over the bare high downs between the Windrush and the Churn, they rode hard. There were few to mark their going, in all the miles from river to river, not a house broke from the flat curves of the turf, the highway was no more than lines worn in it; they passed a waggon creaking under a load of iron from the forest of Dean for Cotswold smithies, a pedlar with his pack upon an ass, no other travellers. Only a shepherd gathering his flock turned to stare at their horses and make a bow to the gentry. They could see far through the sunlight, and saw nothing move between the edges of the sky but sheep and the slow march of the cloud shadows over the turf that changed it from green to brown.

When they began to go down into the valley to ford the Churn, she checked. "Faith, is it over?" he laughed. "I hoped it would last for ever."

The lady was not in the same key. "There's a village here, sir. We'll go quietly, if you please, they will heed us less."

"Why, I think nobody heeds us. We are the wicked, Susan." She looked at him. "Fie, don't you know the scripture? The wicked flee when no man pursueth. It's a text I have had drilled into me, faith."

"If it's the wicked have none to pursue them, sir, you must be most righteous."

"Oh, I have run away from shadows in my time," the long face glowered. "I believe I am doing it again."

"You need not fear that, sir. Mr. Lethernard is with these soldiers."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"It's devilish obliging of Mr. Lethenard. What have I done to the poor gentleman that he takes so much trouble against me?"

"The man is vile," says she and flushed.

He smiled as he looked at her. "It is like that? Well, he has his excuse, poor devil. But, in fact, he seems not so deadly, your Mr. Lethenard. He has missed his thrust."

"Do not be sure of that, sir."

"Why, then, where is he?"

"It is possible you have more friends than you believe."

"Faith, it is easily possible," he laughed. "Confess they did not reveal themselves to-day, my good friends in Cotswold."

She did not answer for a moment. Then she tried to protest. "What do we know? Perhaps some one has made a stand for you."

"You think so?" he laughed. "Perhaps the brave Mr. Blaket. He turned out though he went in again. There was also one who sent advice. Mr. Blaket said Mr. Botynor said—it is certainly he. The invisible Mr. Botynor, he is the hero."

"Sir, you are very happy," says the lady.

"It is hard if I may not laugh. Look, they bid me to Cotswold, these good friends, they protest they pine for me, they vow to have an army ready and a victory assured if only I will appear. Well, I appear, and they are in a panic lest they should be seen with me, they dare not even help me run away. Faith, I wish to bear no malice, but I permit myself to despise them."

"It is not I who say you are wrong. I wonder that you take it gaily."

"It has brought me to you. And here you ride with me. I laugh the world away."

"We are in it yet," says the placid voice, and she sent her horse on.

They were beyond the village, climbing out of the valley, past more than one cross roads into broken wooded country. No pursuit could see them from far, nor be sure which of many ways they had gone. The lady chose to hold on at a steady pace and they came out on the scarp

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

of the hills to see the vale of Gloucester beneath a yellow sunset.

She stopped "Here's the last of Cotswold, sir," she said.

"The end of the world! Faith, it looks like heaven down there," he smiled at the golden fields and turned to smile at her. "Will you venture, Susan?"

"You are in my care, sir. I have to answer for you."

"To whom, then?"

"To myself," says the placid voice. "Let us go on."

"Faith, you treat me like a child," he laughed.

"Sir, I do as I can."

"Ah, but don't stop. It is mighty pleasant. It will be always."

"I am fortunate to amuse you, sir."

"You can do what you will with me," he smiled and changed his tone. "It is I who am fortunate. Believe that I know that." He shrugged. "You chose to serve me. I have ridden this danger with you. Let it go as it will, I have had my hour."

She looked at him with kind eyes. "I wish you better, sir."

"But this—this you will not forget?"

"I shall remember a man who was brave and gay."

"My God, it sounds like an epitaph," he cried.

"Sir, you let no one but yourself be serious."

"I am not with you to make you solemn. That's desecration."

"It is not fair, I cannot mock at you to-night."

"This night and every night of all. I ask no better.'

"Oh, be still. You leave me to think for two of us. Here are we at Gloucester. I cannot find a ship for you to-night. You must not be seen in Gloucester streets."

"Never fear. There's none that knows me here in the west."

She smiled. "Sir, you are something too much the Prince. You take the eye. And——"

"And my family has a curst long face?" he laughed.

"And you must risk nothing. We will go to an inn to-night in the dusk." She broke off to think about that.

"We will then," says he with great solemnity, "have

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

supper. My own poor thoughts are for salmon and a steak, Madam," he leaned out of the saddle and whispered, "would it be politic to drink burgundy? Could the thing be done without peril?"

"I cannot tell, sir. I fear for your head."

"I will risk mine if you will risk yours."

"It is not mine that is in danger. Sir, we will go to the Fleece. I am not known there and I have heard that it is an honest house. We are brother and sister——"

"Madam, you have a bold imagination."

"I must have some reason to give for you. We are Mr. George Stanton, and his sister Sophia, if it comes to names. Pray remember. But you are not well, you must keep your room."

"My dear Sophia, you are too careful of me," he chuckled.

"That is well enough," she admitted. "But you may not be hearty. You are a misery to yourself and me."

"Fie, you love to bully me," he was petulant. "Will that do, ma'am? Lord, Susan, it is true enough."

"Indeed you act prettily," says the placid voice.

Twilight was darkening as they clattered over Gloucester stones. The courtyard of the Fleece was cheerily dim in the red glow from curtained windows. The lady was out of the saddle first and came to give the gentleman her arm and, to the edification of the ostler, he told Sophia not to be a fool. "Dear George," says she, "you are not yourself," and swept by him to meet the landlord in the doorway. There was herself and her brother and she wanted some little place of a parlour—quiet rooms. Her brother, who was from India, had been something faint riding. Nothing, to be sure, no more than supper and bed would make good. The landlord, who had discovered that she was a mighty fine woman, was eager to promise everything of the best, and himself took a pair of candles to light them. The lady was gracious, the gentleman stiff and silent but with a proper interest in wine. The landlord went down again well pleased with them.

Their supper was spread in a low room where the candlelight glimmered on black oak. The lady, having dismissed the landlord with a compliment and a smile, tapped on a door which opened at her touch. "Faith, it was time,

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

my Sophia," the gentleman burst upon her. "I could not have borne to wait any longer."

"Indeed this good man has judged you would be hungry," she smiled at a table spread thick with fish, flesh, and fowl.

"That is not what I wanted." He drew back and looked at her, appraised her, enjoyed her. She stood in her riding habit, strong, and still, she was paler than her wont. "White roses you wear to-night."

"I think you need not find that strange."

"Wear them on your breast, not in your cheeks, Susan," he smiled.

"It is not you who should make me change my colours."

"You are a garden of roses. I want the red too. They are sweet."

She laughed. "This is poetic. Pray, sir, have I leave to sit down?"

"Ask leave! Fie, do you forget you are my sister? Then how shall I remember?" But he set her a chair and waited on her.

So at last they came to supper, and whatever emotions disturbed them, did well by it. The gentleman indeed became something lyrical again about a spiced pie and the burgundy which, as he vowed, set off each other marvellously. But he found that the burgundy, of a genial vineyard, was quite as happy with a cream tart and cherries. And he did manfully and told of wine which in its mellow virtue was fragrant of raspberries, of violets, of wallflowers and, as some wallflowers are, purple and brown at once.

The lady sat silent, having no need nor occasion to say much, Olympian and benign. But he was at last aware of something in her placid eyes that disturbed him. "My sister," says he, "you are laughing at me."

"Indeed I am not. What you see is envy. I am thinking that it must be pleasant to be a man."

"It is glorious to be a man with such a woman as you."

"The woman is vastly obliged to you. Such little things can make a man happy. A spiced pie, a bottle of wine and the world is very good."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Why, there's wicked heresy. A noble wine is no little thing. Faith, child, the world is none so good for me that I hold cheap what brings me comfort."

"You turn jest into earnest. No one must smile but you."

"It's true, I would not have you mock me. I want another look in your eyes."

She let him see them, wide and clear and kind. "If you think that I mock you, you are to blame. Sir, if I had it in me to mock you, I should not be here to-night."

"Ah, you're divine!" he said softly, and started up and came to her side. "My dear, there was never a woman had to give what you give ; never a woman who gave so nobly."

"Sir, I am here to serve you," says the placid voice. "If I can help you to safety, I am content. Your sister could give no more."

"You are no sister, Susan," he smiled. "Ah, the roses are red now. Your heart confesses that."

"I am your servant, sir," she made to rise.

He dropped on one knee beside her, one arm about her, one arm across her knees seeking her hands. "You serve me nobly. But here is no servant nor master, only a man and the woman of his love and his need. Susan! What does your heart say now?"

"You are not generous," she murmured. "Oh, sir, let us have no more of this. I must be still your friend and you make it hard."

His hand grasped at her breast. "My God, if I hurt you it is to give you the delight of yourself. Come, your heart is for me, ah, I can feel it give me welcome." Her breast beat against his hand and he held her against him.

"This is mad," she cried. "Sir, I beg of you. Ah, listen, then!" She freed herself and started up.

A clatter of horse's hoofs came down the street, nearer and nearer.

"It is only one," the Prince said. "But a devil of a hurry. And a tired horse."

She swept to the window and, holding the curtains so that she should not be seen, peered out. The lantern over the archway showed her a steaming horse spattered with

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

foam. The rider turned him into the courtyard and they vanished.

"Well, child?"

"I can't tell. I think it may be Mr. Botynor. We must know."

"The heroic Mr. Botynor!"

"I will go down and see. Pray, sir, keep close. Your own room, that's best." She opened the door for him and shut him in. "Make it fast. Do not open to any but me." She heard him laugh and, flushed and breathless, swept to the head of the stair and listened and went down.

Peter Botynor was talking to the landlord. He looked up, he pulled off his hat. "Lord, madam, is it you?" he said in an admirable surprise. "Your most obedient!"

"Why, Mr. Botynor! Sir, this is very happy. My brother will be mighty glad."

"Is he here? That's noble!"

The landlord smirking pleasure that they were pleased, that his excellent old customer should approve of these good new ones, bowed him upstairs with her.

"What is it?" she said under her breath.

"Nothing but me," Peter smiled.

She brought him into the lighted room and shut the door and leaned against it, still flushed, still breathing quick, and she smiled at him, and it seemed to Mr. Botynor that she had never been so heartily a woman.

"What have you done, sir?"

"Well, I have run away and run after you."

"You come alone?"

"Yes. His friends stay at home," Peter shrugged. "In fact it is no matter now. They could do nothing. The game's lost, madam."

"My God, I know that. What of the soldiers?"

"They'll not trouble him to-night."

She swept across the room, she tapped at the Prince's door, "Sir, here is Mr. Botynor who has news for you."

The Prince chose to take his time. He came out with a manner of some ceremony. "I am much obliged to Mr. Botynor." He sat down and waved Peter to a chair. "How is it with my friends, sir?"

"They are not touched yet, as the thing has gone."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"It's very well. Faith, there is little enough against them, they have been so sage. Pray, Mr. Botynor, did you see anything of my enemies?"

Peter did not like his tone or his smile. "They did me the honour to hunt me for an hour. Taking me, I believe, for you, sir."

"You flatter me, Mr. Botynor." The eyebrows of the long face went up, the mouth went down. "So the dragoons hunted you and you came here. I am obliged to you. Mr. Botynor said go to Gloucester and to Gloucester he brings the pursuit. A happy thought!" he stood up. "Madam, it seems that we must ride again."

"If I were followed, sir, it is not to you that I should have come," Peter cried. "Lord, I did not bring you into Cotswold, but I must see you safe out if I can. The dragoons are all down and the scent's lost. You have a night's grace and more. And to-morrow——"

"Pray, sir, what happened to those dragoons?"

"They hunted me over the hills and in the dusk blundered upon a sheep pool. I had no more trouble with them."

The Prince laughed. "What, the ingenious Mr. Lethenard, is that the end of him?"

"I left them in a heap. They are broken and he among them."

"Amen, so be it. You have had a turn of luck, Mr. Botynor. I wish you may have brought it. You warrant us safe here?"

"You may sleep sound, sir. They can do no more to-night. It's a chance when they pick up the scent again. But I'll be moving at dawn and look to hear of a ship for you. There's no safety long in England!"

"And Mr. Botynor is eager to see my back? Well, sir, we will study to please you. I wish you good night."

Peter stood up, a tired man, and made his bow. The lady curtsied. "Good night, Mr. Botynor," she said. "Sir, if you please," she gave a curtsey to the Prince and swept to her room.

There was the dull decisive sound of a bolt.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The Prince yawned and turned away. "There is some supper there, Mr. Botynor," he said over his shoulder. The door of his room slammed.

Peter sat down to what they had left.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XXV

SIR WILLIAM ZOUCH PROPOSES

WHEN the Prince came into that room again it was morning and the table set for breakfast. But no one waited to receive him. He knocked at the lady's door once, twice and again and had no answer, swore, tried it and found it open on an empty room, and swore more definitely.

Some time passed before the lady presented herself, bright-eyed and rosy with haste, to a gentleman who was spread in languor over two chairs and looked sullenly. She wished him a good morning.

"And how is the adventurous Mr. Botynor?" said he.

"I wish I could tell you, sir. I have been looking for him, but he was gone out long ago."

"Oh, a busy gentleman."

"Yes, sir, in your service."

"I'm devilish obliged to him," the Prince laughed.

"Indeed you have reason."

He started up. "Have I, Susan? Faith, I could have done without the gentleman last night." He took her hands and kissed them. "So could you, I swear."

She flushed, but she looked at him steadily. "You must not think so. You have no right."

"What, if you had not heard his damned horse, we should be happy."

Her bosom rose. "I should be what I am now," she cried. "Sir, I am here to serve you. You do not make it easy. May I ask you to treat me with some honour?"

"Good God, child, no man ever honoured a woman more. I am at your will. You know it. You command my soul."

"Ah, not I," she laughed a little sadly. "Pray, sir, let's not talk so. I'll command you to breakfast." She turned

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

and called a servant and drew the Prince to the window and held him in talk about nothing while the tray was brought, that his face should not be seen.

"Faith, you should keep me wrapped up like a baby," says he as he sat down, "and only lift my veil for those you know. I vow you think I am a baby."

The lady did not deny it. She smiled and gave him his coffee. "Pray, sir, you are learned in babies?"

"I see them in your eyes, my dear."

So she had to try again, and to be safe this time spoke of horses. She had been to see their horses, which were none the worse, and she was very glad, for she had a kindness for her mare, of whom there were stories to be told, which went on till the Prince, though a doughty trencherman, was at the end of his breakfast and something more, which indeed were only stopped by a knock at the door.

She started up. "If you please, madam," said a voice she knew.

"Mr. Botynor, but of course!"

"But of course Mr. Botynor," the Prince laughed. "What is it now, my good friend?"

"All's well, sir," said Peter gloomily enough. "There's a schooner bound for Nantes lying at Framilode. Her captain rides down to go aboard this morning. She'll sail on the afternoon tide."

"Do you know this captain, sir? Do you answer for the fellow?"

Peter looked at him with melancholy patience. "The man's a friend of my friends. You will be safe once you are aboard."

"For which Mr. Botynor is impatient. Sir, I shall study to oblige you. Pray, have you told your captain who I am?"

"No, sir. Best for him he should not know. You are still Mr. Alexander. He has a hint you are in some trouble for an affair of honour. He'll ask no questions."

"You're very thoughtful. Pray give me leave," he waved Peter out of the room—out of existence.

"I beg pardon, sir. You should not delay. The captain will be riding out of Gloucester presently. He'll not miss his tide for any man."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I'll wait on you, Mr. Botynor," the Prince said haughtily.

Mr. Botynor made him a bow. The door closed behind Mr. Botynor.

"The gentleman is absolute, Susan. We are to have no time to doubt. Do you know him well?"

"I have no fear, sir. What he promises will not fail."

"A gentleman who is never worse than his word? It's very well. A gloomier gentleman I have not found."

"Oh, you may trust him!" she cried.

"If you do, I can. Well, child, it's mount and go. He is raging to be rid of us."

"I wish you all good things, sir," she said.

"What!"

"There's no more I can do."

"Good God, you're not to leave me now," he sprang upon her and took her in his arms. "That's not what you promised."

"Promised!" she cried fiercely. "Ah, let me be. You'll not gain upon me so. I have promised you nothing, nothing ever."

"Oh, not in words. Do we want words, you and I? Your eyes, your hands, all of you—they've pledged you; my God, you know it, they're for me now."

"This is noble, sir," she said; she did not struggle but held herself from him, her arms guarding her breast, strong and still. "I have done for you what I could. Because it fell to me, because you were unfortunate, oh, because I was glad to serve you. I——"

"There is no one else," he broke in. "My dear, I have no one in the world but you. Won't you serve me still? Look, I have failed again. I am to go back and wait and watch and wander alone. My God, it was hard enough before. But I have lived by your side. I have felt your life. Susan, I am not to lose that now."

He had won something. She yielded a little in his grasp, her face was pale and gentle. He pressed on eagerly. "Come with me and I'll show you what it is to serve the gratefullest man alive. I can give you joy of yourself you never thought for. And you—you're wine to my soul,

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

you're hope and power. Come with me and we'll win the great stake yet, you and I."

She put back her head. She looked down at him under drooping eyelids. "I have done what I could," she said. "This—this does not speak to me."

"My God, it is you or nothing. If I am to lose you, that's an end." He let her go and flung himself into a chair.

"Sir, you should be in the saddle," she said. "Mr. Botynor!"

A gloomy face looked in at them.

"Mr. Botynor may go to the devil," the Prince growled.

"It's very possible," says Mr. Botynor. "Your horse is waiting, sir!"

"Let it wait."

"The ship will not!" Peter shrugged. "If you miss that you may wait long enough."

"I'll not keep you, Mr. Botynor."

Peter looked at the lady. "Good God, sir, do you choose to be taken with Miss Lovel?" he cried. But she held up her hand. She was listening to some sound from below. Peter heard it too, a jovial, hoarse voice.

"Miss Stanton. Ah yes," the speaker laughed. "Her brother to be sure. I thank ye, I'll go up."

"That's Zouch," Peter said. "You have waited too long, sir."

"Who the devil is Zouch?"

The lady spoke while he spoke. "Into your room, sir, go. Mr. Botynor, you too." She swept them away. The bedroom door was hardly shut upon them before Sir William Zouch opened the door from the stair. He stood still, his broad red face arranged itself slowly into an incredulous smile.

"I beg a thousand pardons, ma'am. I came to wait on an old friend."

"Sir, you have found one," the lady came smiling with her hand out.

"Miss Lovel's most kind. But I heard of Miss Stanton and——"

"Fie, sir, you're not discreet," she pushed the door to. "You'll not betray me, I hope."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Who, I? I never told on a woman yet. Not unless it was to please her. The creatures affect that kind of fame sometimes, ma'am." He took snuff. "An error, I humbly conceive. A woman is most fragrant when she hath no scent." The lady had not yet asked him to sit down. "But I am in the way. You are expecting your brother."

"Sir, you amuse yourself with me. You know very well that I have no brother."

"Lord, I'll not limit your family!" His tone was charged with offence. "Every woman has a right to endow herself with a brother when she wants one."

"You try to hurt me, sir. That is not the way. Are you here to pay me for what you have suffered? You might believe I did nothing against you."

"Suffered? Oh, I'm not sore, ma'am. Faith, I may have thought you quick to throw me over. But I never supposed you were in Mr. Lethenard's confidence."

"You know everything now?" she said in a low voice.

Sir William laughed and walked across the room and sat down in the window seat. She watched him with anxious eyes. "No, ma'am, not everything. I don't expect to. I am a poor reasonable animal, and, faith, reason isn't much help in this business. *Par exemple*, what is Miss Lovel doing here, and why is she Miss Stanton and what happy man is her brother?"

The lady came nearer. "*Par exemple*," she said, "why did Sir William Zouch come to Cotswold, and what did he want at Ashcombe?"

The gentleman looked out of the window and looked back at her and took snuff. "Faith, not to get a girl murdered," says he. "That's what I hadn't thought of. You are original folk, you Jacobites. You have ideas."

"Don't taunt me with that girl!" she cried. "We never knew, we never guessed. The man who did that was a traitor."

"It's very possible. They occur—in plots. Which is a reason for misliking plots, ma'am. But Lord, what's a reason! Well, I had a reason for coming to Ashcombe. I came to prevent that folly which you are caught in."

"You were my guest and I thought my friend."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"So did I, faith."

"Not a spy."

He laughed. "That's my cue, isn't it? Now we play the grand scene. I vow I am a gentleman of honour, madam is pathetic, passionate, tragic. How does it go? I blench, I quail, see goodness in her shape, how awful. You condescend divinely (that's the use of such a shape). I rend my heart and my garments and swear to purge and live cleanly and save everybody for the light of your beautiful eyes. But it don't come to me. I am too old for it. A spy? If you please. I was sent to stop this crazy plot, and I am so cool a rogue I think that more of a gentleman's work than theirs that began it. And, by God, ma'am, I'll make an end of it now." He stood up. "I desire your company, Miss Lovel." He waved his hand at the door.

"Lord, sir, you have had it long enough. Is there still more to say?"

"Madam, will you walk? It's best you should not be taken here."

"Taken?"

He laughed. "Damme, did you think to run away with him? That's what won't happen. We'll have the soldiers here soon enough. I don't choose they should find you with him."

She stared at him. Then as some scurry of sound came into the room she broke out volubly. "Sir, you are pleased to be insolent. I can't tell how that shall serve you. I promise you, it will gain nothing of me. I do not fear you or anything you can do. I——"

He had been listening with a twisted smile; he turned away to the window and she broke off as she heard the sound of horses. She swept across the room and looked out. She saw the back of the Prince, the back of Mr. Botynor, speeding away.

"*Enfin!*" Sir William said with a chuckle.

That startled her. But she turned to face him boldly. "Sir, you have been pleased to threaten me."

"Now that's ungrateful. Damme, I study to serve you."

"But I think you lack skill. Pray, Sir William, what is it you have against me?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"The lawyers will call it treason if you give them the chance. I had a mind to call it a folly. What's your word for it? A passion?"

"You are insolent."

"*Vous l'avez voulu, Georges Dandin,*" he smiled. "Faith, ma'am, you leave me no choice."

"Is it in your commission to insult a woman? I have been too patient, sir. I was ready to indulge you because you were belied and wronged. But I am not to bear this malice. You brag of some authority. What are you that you intrude upon me?"

"Well roared, lion!" he smiled. "*De par le roy, madam.*"

"I suppose I may be private in my inn."

"Private? Why, yes, you would want to be private, yo and your brother. A sisterly affection, egad, and I am desolated to intrude on it. But the world's curious, madam, the world's censorious. You'll have to explain the gentleman. What's he to you or you to him?"

"I see that Sir William Zouch will never understand," she said slowly: in fact there was something which she did not understand and it alarmed her: why he stayed talking still. She was doing her best to keep him busy with her, but he made it too easy. He ought to be impatient, he ought to be away after the Prince. Perhaps he was only playing with her, cat and mouse. Perhaps he had men out ready to catch the fugitives and everything had failed at last.

The wretch was smiling. "Here's a sign of grace! Madam confesses. It was the Pretender. A friend that cleaveth closer than a brother, I conceive. Pray, where is he cleaving now?"

"Sir, you speak to me so that I cannot answer you."

"Could you answer that however I asked it? Well, let us help each other. Better I should rummage Miss Lovel's room than a trooper. Where did you put His Royal Highness?" He looked about him. "Two doors—two bedrooms, I conceive. Faith, I would not be indelicate. Pray, which was yours?"

The lady sat herself down with great deliberation and was silent.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"So did I, faith."

"Not a spy."

He laughed. "That's my cue, isn't it? Now we play the grand scene. I vow I am a gentleman of honour, madam is pathetic, passionate, tragic. How does it go? I blench, I quail, see goodness in her shape, how awful. You condescend divinely (that's the use of such a shape). I rend my heart and my garments and swear to purge and live cleanly and save everybody for the light of your beautiful eyes. But it don't come to me. I am too old for it. A spy? If you please. I was sent to stop this crazy plot, and I am so cool a rogue I think that more of a gentleman's work than theirs that began it. And, by God, ma'am, I'll make an end of it now." He stood up. "I desire your company, Miss Lovel." He waved his hand at the door.

"Lord, sir, you have had it long enough. Is there still more to say?"

"Madam, will you walk? It's best you should not be taken here."

"Taken?"

He laughed. "Damme, did you think to run away with him? That's what won't happen. We'll have the soldiers here soon enough. I don't choose they should find you with him."

She stared at him. Then as some scurry of sound came into the room she broke out volubly. "Sir, you are pleased to be insolent. I can't tell how that shall serve you. I promise you, it will gain nothing of me. I do not fear you or anything you can do. I——"

He had been listening with a twisted smile; he turned away to the window and she broke off as she heard the sound of horses. She swept across the room and looked out. She saw the back of the Prince, the back of Mr. Botynor, speeding away.

"*Enfin!*" Sir William said with a chuckle.

That startled her. But she turned to face him boldly. "Sir, you have been pleased to threaten me."

"Now that's ungrateful. Damme, I study to serve you."

"But I think you lack skill. Pray, Sir William, what is it you have against me?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"The lawyers will call it treason if you give them the chance. I had a mind to call it a folly. What's your word for it? A passion?"

"You are insolent."

"*Vous l'avez voulu, Georges Dandin,*" he smiled. "Faith, ma'am, you leave me no choice."

"Is it in your commission to insult a woman? I have been too patient, sir. I was ready to indulge you because you were belied and wronged. But I am not to bear this malice. You brag of some authority. What are you that you intrude upon me?"

"Well roared, lion!" he smiled. "*De par le roy, madam.*"

"I suppose I may be private in my inn."

"Private? Why, yes, you would want to be private, yo and your brother. A sisterly affection, egad, and I am desolated to intrude on it. But the world's curious, madam, the world's censorious. You'll have to explain the gentleman. What's he to you or you to him?"

"I see that Sir William Zouch will never understand," she said slowly: in fact there was something which she did not understand and it alarmed her: why he stayed talking still. She was doing her best to keep him busy with her, but he made it too easy. He ought to be impatient, he ought to be away after the Prince. Perhaps he was only playing with her, cat and mouse. Perhaps he had men out ready to catch the fugitives and everything had failed at last.

The wretch was smiling. "Here's a sign of grace! Madam confesses. It was the Pretender. A friend that cleaveth closer than a brother, I conceive. Pray, where is he cleaving now?"

"Sir, you speak to me so that I cannot answer you."

"Could you answer that however I asked it? Well, let us help each other. Better I should rummage Miss Lovel's room than a trooper. Where did you put His Royal Highness?" He looked about him. "Two doors—two bedrooms, I conceive. Faith, I would not be indelicate. Pray, which was yours?"

The lady sat herself down with great deliberation and was silent.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I hope there's no confusion, ma'am. Still silent? 'Henceforth I never will speak word.'" He tried one door, which happened to be hers and was not bolted. He went in and was gone some time. He came out humming that Jacobite song "And Charlie, he's my darling, Charlie, he's my darling, the young Chevalier." He made for the other door. That would not open. "Do you keep the key, ma'am? No? Maybe there's another hole to the earth." He went out to the stair and found an open door. She heard him moving to and fro and he changed his tune

Royal Charlie's now awa,
Safely owre the friendly main:
Mony a heart will break in twa
Should he ne'er come back again.

Will you no come back again?
Will you ne'er come back again?
Better loved you'll never be
Will you no come back again?

The lady flushed.

He strode heavily back. "So the fox is out of his earth," he said. "Do you know what bolted him?" The lady who did not look at it was aware of a puckered, twisted smile. "I swear he was there when I came. He didn't hurry neither. Didn't want to go without you, ma'am. But as soon as he heard you was taken he was off. A damned reasonable gentleman."

The lady had to let her tongue go. "Oh, sir, you are the worst loser in the world."

"You think so? Maybe you're right. I don't remember. I am not apt to lose on a long reckoning. And you, ma'am, do you lose handsomely?"

"Sir, I hope I have pride enough for that."

"God keep your ladyship still of that mind," he chuckled.

"At least I will not jeer or brag, whatever comes."

"Miss Lovel is most kind. It encourages me. I vow it does. And I must make bold to ask her parole."

The lady laughed. "Lord, sir, shall I give you my sword too?"

"What's that? Your face or your shape, or your wit—or your fortune?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"I like the order of precedence. It flatters me."

"Faith, I spoke as a brother," says he and drove the laughter from her eyes. "Miss Lovel will give me her word to stay here in the inn and have no more to do with the Pretender or any of his friends."

"Miss Lovel," said the placid voice, "will give you nothing at all."

He frowned. "You'll consider, madam, I cannot permit you help the King's enemies. I am content to trust to Miss Lovel's honour. I wish to manage the affair that she may not be distressed."

"And King George not put a woman in prison."

"Oh, damme," the gentleman cried, "if you want to be a martyr!"

"That is courteous," said the placid voice, "that is generous."

He gave an angry laugh. "Oh, woman, every way! You'll help the Pretender, but if the King stops you, he's a rude fellow."

"If your King can only reign by making martyrs, what manner of King is he?"

"I don't think you a martyr, I promise you," the gentleman cried.

"But you fear that others will," said the placid voice. "Sir, I feel for you. But what would you have? To make martyrs, it is the misfortune of your profession."

"My God, you will talk the world away! Come, madam, I must have your parole or set men to watch you."

"It is genteel in you not to call them spies."

Sir William surveyed her with an angry tolerance: "What you need is not a spy, it's a governess," he growled.

And then they were interrupted. A red and breathless fellow broke into the room. "Sir William? Sir, they ha' took him. The dragoons from Oxford, they ha' took him. They're up with him to the Guildhall now."

Sir William grunted, Sir William frowned and thrust his hand under his wig, and rubbed his head, and his red face twisted and wrinkled. "Well, ma'am, here's an end!

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Off with you, Jim. My compliments to Captain Vincent, egad. I'll be with him presently." He strode to the head of the stairs and shouted for a coach. "Madam, I must command your company."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. BOTYNOR IS THE HERO

SOMETHING of a crowd clustered about the Guildhall. The chaise from the Fleece came slowly, and curious eyes stared in at a lady who sat erect and a gentleman who leaned forward and looked about him as curious as they, but he was brisk to hand her out and bustle her into the Hall.

Amidst a buzz of talk and movement she was aware of some red-coats. Sir William held up his hand and beckoned, but still drew her on till they were in a musty, grim room. Before he had set a chair for her, Captain Vincent was with them, jovial and loud.

"What, sir, have you got the lady? Well, I've got the man. Madam, your most obedient. You gave us a mighty good run."

The lady sat down at her leisure and contemplated his cheery assurance and turned to Sir William Zouch. "Sir, am I to know this gentleman?" she said.

"It's Captain Vincent of the Duke's dragoons, ma'am." Sir William sat down. "All the way from Oxford to serve you. Faith, now I think of it, what brought you out of Oxford, captain? You had no orders, that I know?"

The captain was startled. "I had news of the Pretender, sir. That's orders enough for me. And, egad, it's proved true."

"Lucky man. Well, who was your Judas? Who betrayed him?"

"A Cotswold squire, Geoffrey Lethenard."

Sir William frowned. "You ha' been keeping damned good company, my friend."

"Why, sir, I never saw the fellow till he brought his

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

news. He was a rogue, I don't doubt. But it's no matter what he was, he's dead and cold."

Sir William glanced at the lady, who gave no sign that she heard. "Damme, you have been busy. You're the devil of a fellow, Vincent. Dead is he? How's that?"

"He broke his back at a wall when the Pretender and madam here were showing sport over the hills."

"Broke his back?" Sir William growled. His red face was not amiable. "I'll not thank you for that, my friend. Well, things must be as they may. That's the humour of it." He rubbed his head and frowned.

The lady looked at him with wonder and dislike. He was surely the most malign man alive. She was to listen while he talked of Lethenard and how Lethenard died. Oh, if he thought that would hurt her he must find he was wrong. But he could hurt, he was hurting. He played with her still, a sleek great cat of a man. There was only one thing that mattered—the Prince. And the wretch would not speak of him.

Captain Vincent also suffered from surprise and impatience and did not care to hide it. His great deed was neglected while the old fool maundered about Lethenard. "I suppose you don't want the rogue alive again," he exploded. "Why, if he was in that murder of yours, you could never have touched him after this. I've got the Pretender by him."

"Damn your impudence," Sir William growled.

"If you please, sir. Well, I have the gentleman below. What's to do with him?"

"Where did you lose him?" Sir William growled.

"Lost him? Oh, you mean last night. Faith, he was running in full view——"

"Where was the lady?"

"That's more than I know," the captain smiled. "You may ask her. The gentleman drew us after him very handsomely. Egad, sir, he's a gallant fellow and as pretty a man across country as ever I saw. He has a damned good eye for a country too. Well, I was looking to run into him any minute but the dark came down and he led us into one of these cursed walled ponds—and down we went and my gentleman slipped away."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Sir William showed signs of interest. "Knew the country, did he?" One eyebrow went up and he looked sideways at the lady. "Well, that's how you lost him. How did you find him?"

"Faith, we could do no more last night. A little country fellow took us down to a village and we lay there till dawn. Then I made a cast and heard of my gentleman on the Gloucester road. So to Gloucester we came and picked up more news of him and his grey. A good horse that, but it's a bad colour for a gentleman that wants to be private. They said he was at the Fleece and, egad, sir, I was coming to the cross roads when I saw him going away south. Well, we made after him and he broke for the hills again and gave us a damned good run, but we had him beat up there under the steep. And here he is."

Sir William chuckled. "You've done well, my lad. You'll have to tell that tale to the Duke." He looked at his watch. "Well, let's make an end of it. Have him in."

The captain marched out. Sir William rose heavily and went to the window and put as much of himself out of the open casement as he could. He was still in that situation when Captain Vincent brought in Mr. Botynor.

The lady's bosom rose. Large eyes questioned Mr. Botynor and Mr. Botynor smiled. Blood came to her cheeks. She sat silent and still a moment. Then rose and curtsied. Mr. Botynor bowed.

"Sir William!" Captain Vincent cried to the broad back at the window. "His Royal Highness."

Sir William turned. Sir William contemplated Mr. Botynor with grave curiosity and took snuff. After which he bowed and set a chair.

Mr. Botynor bowed and sat down. "Madam, pray be seated," he said. The lady obeyed, composed her skirts, gazed at Sir William.

His self-control was not less admirable. "Captain Vincent," says he in a cool official manner, "was the gentleman alone?"

And again Captain Vincent was startled. "Faith, sir, I'll not swear to that. I have a notion there were some other fellows tried to draw us off by the Bristol road. But they didn't hinder us. I knew my man."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Sir William grunted and turned to Mr. Botynor. "Pray, sir, do you choose to tell me who was with you?"

"Sir, I choose to answer nothing to a gentleman who has no right to ask anything of me."

Captain Vincent smiled approval.

And Sir William also smiled, that twisted smile which Susan had learnt to dread. "You take it high, sir," he said. "Well, play your part your own way." And again he used snuff and seemed to be waiting for something.

What came was a little man, hot and dusty. "Sir William? Sir, by your leave——" but he had no need to ask. Sir William swung out of the room with him. And Peter Botynor looked down, for he had not counted on Mr. Martin coming into the game again.

They were not long gone. "Come, in with you, Jack," Sir William thrust the little man into the room before him. "Now, who's that gentleman; do you know him?"

"Why, to be sure, it's Mr. Peter Botynor of Prior's Humble. Servant, Mr. Botynor." He grinned all over his face.

"Faith, I had a notion of it myself," says Sir William and glowered at Captain Vincent. "Damme, you ha' done mighty well, my lad. You will have a tale to tell the Duke! Pretender, my God! Oh, bully Bottom, it's you to play the ass."

Captain Vincent was shaken. He looked from one to the other and back again and at last found words in plenty. "Gad's my life, sir, I swear that's the gentleman that stayed at Ashcombe. That's him they call Mr. Alexander. Madam there carried him off with her. He would not stand when I challenged him. I was hunting him all last night and he ran like a fox."

"What a head! What a head!" Sir William growled. "Damme, Vincent, you haven't sense enough to mind geese on a common. What the devil had you to do with gentlemen at Ashcombe? You was put at Oxford to be at my orders. I gave you no orders, and you go roaring across Cotswold to please that cursed scroundrel Lethenard and spoil all. Do you think you wear the King's uniform to set all the country against it by harrying honest gentlemen?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"Honest gentlemen! Honest gentlemen don't run from the King's uniform, sir."

"What, if you had your private business with a lady, God help the girl, would you want a troop of dragoons to come between you?"

"Oh, sir, I see the gentleman is a friend of yours. I suppose you have your reasons. But you know very well the Pretender was in Cotswold, here's the man——" but Mr. Martin burst out laughing.

"Damn your impudence," Sir William roared. "To be sure I know the Pretender was in Cotswold and I had all ready for him. But you must go blundering in and give the alarm and he's off and away. What's that you said, Jack?" he turned on Martin. "Took ship, ain't he?"

"That's right, sir. The lad's got aboard at Framilode. We was too late."

"There's for you! He's off to France and you—you bring me a Cotswold squire——" he measured Mr. Botynor with a humorous eye—"a deal too short and something too plump. Damme, Vincent, they'll laugh you out of the army if you're not drummed out before."

"Well, sir," Captain Vincent flinched, "I swear I was in my duty. I wanted——" he failed before Sir William's frown.

"Oh, don't be shy now, don't be modest. You wanted the price that was on the lad's head."

"Sir! Sir, I'll not endure this," the captain cried. "I am a King's officer. I am not here to——"

"Why the devil are you here?"

Captain Vincent struggled with himself. "At your orders, Sir William," he muttered.

"Orders, my God! You had your orders. Take your men back to Oxford and wait for some more. You'll have them."

Captain Vincent hesitated, stammered, and repented of it, and the door slammed after him.

With a jerk of the head Sir William dismissed Mr. Martin, who took his leave of the company in a knowing grin. Sir William dropped into a chair and breathed hard. "God deliver me from fools," he said with passion.

The lady smiled. "Sir, we are here yet." He looked at

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

her heavily. "I have done you a wrong, sir. I did not guess you were so fine an actor. But must you be acting still?"

"Here's no acting, madam. I wish the gentleman at the devil. I'll do my possible to send him there."

"You will have trouble to make me believe it. I think you are well content with the gentleman. You did not intend the Prince should be taken."

Sir William turned to Mr. Botynor. "Look you, here is gall. Because I would not let her go with him, she says I was playing double. That's what it is to protect her, God help you."

"What would you have?" Peter shrugged. "To protect her, that's presumption. She needs neither you nor me."

"Fie, don't be jealous. I vow she is not so far gone."

The lady was blushing. "Indeed, sir, you have amused yourself enough with me. And I will own you have hurt me, which I thought I should never confess to you."

She saw that twisted smile. "Faith, child, that's pretty," he said. "I am not such a rogue but I know it. Never forgive me, it will be best so. I had to play the hand that was dealt me and I played a sharper's game. I must needs win."

"Forgive?" said the placid voice. "I hope I don't forgive my friends. I promise you I shall never forget. A sharper's game? Indeed you mock me still. You have the right. I called you the worst loser in the world. And you—you were playing to lose a great stake and lose it handsomely."

And again Sir William appealed to Mr. Botynor. "You know the creature. Will you tell me what she has got in her head?"

"Why, sir, that it is you who have saved the Prince, said Peter. "That you have been generous," he laughed. "Faith, that's a little word."

"Lord, do you put it on me?" Sir William cried. "I swear that's shameless. Pray, Mr. Botynor, what the devil were you doing?"

"Shaking in my shoes. Faith, I am all cold still."'

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

The lady looked at him with flashing eyes. "I am to believe that!" she cried. "I am to believe that Mr. Botynor was afraid to be with the Prince and Sir William was eager to capture him but Mr. Botynor chose to come to him and Sir William was at pains to help him escape. Oh, you are very strange people."

"Mr. Botynor—Lord, yes, Mr. Botynor's devilish strange. But me—look 'e, child, what the devil do you think I stood to lose if the fellow got off?"

The lady gazed at him and blushed and looked down.

Sir William grunted. "So that's it. The price on his head. I thank you." He laughed. "Well, maybe I would earn it if I had the chance. But I have not. No, ma'am. I take the King's wages and do the King's work. I don't play double, not even for Miss Lovel's beautiful eyes. It's very true, I contrived your Prince should escape. And the devil of a business I had betwixt you and him, him that wouldn't go without you and you that was so mighty ready to be a martyr when some fool was likely to blunder in any minute and catch him. But don't make a romance of it. I was none of your tricky heroes. It's not in my way. I keep to my orders, do you see?"

"I see that I am not to thank you," said the placid voice. "Sir William Zouch had orders to come to Cotswold and save the Pretender! Faith, sir, I can't tell whose doing that was, but it is marvellous in my eyes. The Prince, as you were saying, has a price on his head."

"And the last thing King George wants is that anyone should earn it. There is a price on the lad's head to keep him out of the country. I came to Cotswold because some of your silly squires meant to bring him over and they could not venture it while I was watching. Then that rogue Lethenard put me out of the way and the lad came."

"Pray, sir, do us justice," Peter said. "There was none but Lethenard in that villainy, and we were quick enough to find out and turn on him and clear you."

"I do Mr. Botynor justice. He was quick. The others—well, God deliver me from fools. Oh, I bear no malice, Mr. Botynor——"

Peter laughed. "Faith, I believe that. I have cause."

"Not you. Of the two of us, it's me that's obliged.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Egad, madam," he turned to the lady, "if you make a romance of it, Mr. Botynor is the hero."

The lady bent her head. "I do not say no."

"If somebody is to be made a fool of, it would come to me," said Peter.

"Indeed, Mr. Botynor. I have had my share," said the placid voice. "Let us stand together. Can you tell me, pray, why the gentleman should be at pains to save the Prince and save us and say it's King George's pleasure?"

"I conceive the gentleman chooses to be a gentleman, ma'am. It's mighty awkward. We don't look for it in a Whig."

"Do you not? Pray what are you, sir. Whig or Jacobite?"

"Sir, if you'll not tell on me," Mr. Botynor whispered, "I could never be sure."

"Here is a fine fellow to go risking his head for the Pretender!"

"It seems there was no great risk!" Peter shrugged.

"If that fool Vincent had caught you and him, you were sped."

"The King would have had my head. And the King's man is at pains to help me off." Peter looked at Miss Lovel. "Behold, he tells us a mystery."

"Did ever you hear the tale of old King William? There was some pestilent Jacobite of his time, ma'am, and fools wanted him hanged. 'It's true,' says the King, 'he has set his heart on being a martyr. But I have set mine on disappointing him.' There's your mystery, Miss Lovel. Don't you see, when the Pretender makes a noise, there will always be fools howling for blood and other fools trying to make a profit of it. But it don't do. There's the devil to pay after. Look at the Duke. He did what half England was crying for when he bled the Highlanders and now we call him the Butcher. Never again, that's the word now. I was sent down to keep all quiet however and howsoever. There will be no complaints, ma'am. Faith, when I go back, they'll be very civil to me at Court. But if that fool Vincent had caught the lad, there would have been the devil to pay. Good God," he flung himself back with a laugh, "what would our little George do with him? Cut his head

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

off? Half the country would sour on us. Keep him in prison? That's to set all Europe buzzing plots. And one way or t'other we would have to come down on your Cotswold squires, and there's the country gentlemen raging. Lord, we were damned near the edge yesterday. And we would have been over but for you. King George is devilish obliged to you, I swear he is. Mr. Botynor you are a hero."

"By running away. Yes, sir, I am very good at that. It is my trade, as Miss Lovel will tell you."

"Oh, mercy," the placid voice said. "I thought the men had forgotten me."

Sir William nudged Mr. Botynor. "That's your cue, not mine," he grinned. "What? Here's modesty. The gentleman would have your ladyship to know that he drew the soldiers off and led 'em to the devil to put you in the Pretender's arms, having, God help him, a pure saintly desire to serve you."

"The gentleman," says Peter, "was humbly studying to amuse Sir William Zouch. What else are we for, madam?"

"Sir, I have been wondering this long while. But prisoners must not be peevish."

Sir William flung up his hands. "Prisoner? God ha' mercy, child, I have no cage to keep you in," and she saw that twisted smile.

She rose and made him a curtsey. "Pray sir, will you keep a free woman company? Will you——"

"Oh no, no, no. My reputation, ma'am, my reputation. We be enemies."

She gave him her hand.

"Go your ways," He opened the door for them and in the doorway caught Peter's shoulder. "Mr. Botynor! She fights well," he chuckled.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

CHAPTER XXVII

MISS LOVEL GOES INTO THE GARDEN

MR. FETTIPLACE was drinking a white wine of Bordeaux with a peach. This conjunction he urged upon Peter Botynor and eagerly desired to know his opinion of it. Peter ate and sipped and was civil. and the face of Mr. Fettiplace fell. " I fear that you think the wine sweet," says he sadly.

" Oh, sir, it's a soft buxom wine and fragrant."

" But sweet," Mr. Fettiplace sighed, " but sweet. That's the fault, sir.

" Why, something rich for me. But I have a poor, rude taste. I am not worthy these fine things."

Mr. Fettiplace sighed again and pushed round the burgundy. " That's the wine for a man, as they say. But I could never tell why a man should not like a wine that's gentle and sweet. I protest it's a heresy of the moderns. The Greeks did their work on sweet wines, and sure, the wine must have been as good as the work."

His granddaughter smiled upon him and went out into the garden.

" But they put water in theirs," said Peter and transferred the water decanter from her place to her grandfather's.

Mr. Fettiplace shuddered. " It's a horrid thought, my dear fellow. You're not kind to recall it. Like the weakness of a great man or a noble woman. Sure, there's no doubt it was the water in their wine which destroyed them."

" Why, but they got nobly drunk, I believe. The sweetness was the mischief, sir."

" My dear boy ! To be sure there were some that said heaven must needs be eternal intoxication. But there's Plato for it, a man should only get drunk in honour of the gods. Do you know your Athenæus ? " Peter did not.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"He has a pretty thing about the right Attic taste. I must show you," he tripped off to get the book.

But Peter did not wait for him.

The garden lay in the golden sunshine of evening, no sound in the warm fragrance but the hum of bees and the murmur of the stream. He saw a gleam of blue by the pool where the box hedge was cut away to make room and shade for a marble seat. Miss Lovel sat there and the flood of her blue silk fell to the clear amber of the water and the white lilies.

"So Mr. Botynor does not like sweets?" she smiled. "An austere man. I had almost guessed it."

"Pray, ma'am, look again," Peter paraded himself with a comfortable satisfaction. "Something round, I humbly conceive, something mellow."

"I am not to judge you by your shape. You are not a woman. No, faith, a man with a cruel conscience. A man who takes himself hard."

"Is that my character? I vow none of my friends would know me."

"You take some pains not to be known. But I think you flatter yourself. Well, you must be what you will. Pray, where is my grandfather?"

"Bless him," Peter smiled, "he is looking for Athenæus."

But Mr. Fettiplace came out with his book on the terrace. "Sir, I think he is looking for you."

"He will not see me," said Peter; "the garden is enchanted."

"By Mr. Botynor?"

"I have no magic. It is in the light, in the sounds, in the fragrance."

"The man becomes poetical! Lord, the garden is certainly enchanted."

"But the lady does not feel it?"

"It is a garden that I have been in many times. When you have you will be calm enough."

"I would not desire that."

"Lord, here is a miracle! Mr. Botynor aspires to enthusiasm."

"The truth is, he has been afraid of it this long while."

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

"It's a strange thing," says the placid voice, "men will always fear they may be what they are not like to be."

"Miss Lovel has studied man?"

"Sir, I have had some lessons. But pray give me another."

"I believe I am trying."

"Oh, Lord, it is easy work, it goes by rule. The man tells me what he is and what he desires to be and when he is gravelled for lack of matter, he says I am a mighty fine creature too."

"How shall I tell you what I am? You have always known more of that than I do."

"It was not difficult," she put back her head and looked at him with closing eyes.

"Or, at least, you always thought you did."

"Which offends Mr. Botynor?"

"Faith, it holds him off. There's a fellow you have in your head which is not the fellow I know."

"And you like your man better?"

"A poor thing but mine own. He has a certain pride, ma'am. He don't choose to be taken for some one else."

"Pride! Oh, proud as Lucifer," the lady cried, "but the simplest man alive. He has no notion that he can do anything at all, but whatever he is to do he will do it and never fear what it may cost him. He'll never work for himself, but for his friends there's all that he is—and his enemies, if they be in danger. He wants nothing, a happy creature, only to fish his stream. Pray, sir, was it good sport last night?"

"Yes, ma'am; is it good sport to-day?"

"Fie, the man should not blush. That's not his part."

"I thought we had changed our parts. It is you who have been telling me what I am."

"Sir, you would have it so. But you may set all right. Take your revenge. There is my Peter Botynor. Give me a Susan Lovel. I promise you, I will blush if I can." She lay back at her ease. Her face was shadowed but the sunlight found her bare bosom and played there.

"This is the garden of the golden fleece," Peter said, "and——"

"Lord, the man goes back to his beginning! He is

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

enchanted again. I thought he had grown out of that."

"Yes, you hoped that before. Are you afraid, too?"

"Too! I like the word. But, indeed, Mr. Botynor has been afraid of me this long while. Pray sir, tell me when did it begin?"

"The first day I saw you. When you came down the stair in all your glory, peacock blue for your white and gold and your bosom bare. As you are now."

The sunlight betrayed a flush in that bosom. "Lord, I remember," said the placid voice. "It was the day you were carrying Kitty. You were surely in the vein that day, sir. You said you were not afraid of me then."

"You remember very well too," Peter smiled.

"If you please," said the placid voice.

"Well, I was honest enough——"

"Sir, it's not denied."

"I was not afraid till I saw you on the stair. Then—why, my dear, you are something too grand for me. Don't you see, I am a plain fellow that does very well to fish a stream, as you were saying. And you—you are a glorious creature, a daughter of the sun; you move in light, you're not for common living. But the devil of it is, I crave for you."

She stood up. "In fact," says the placid voice, "Mr. Botynor thinks me pretty."

He laughed. "You are exquisite lovely. My God, you know that. It's part of your damned charm to know it."

"Sir, I suppose I was made to be used," she looked in his eyes.

He took her hands, which were very ready, but he went on talking. "My dear, is it for me?"

She smiled long suffering. "I am to open all my doors? Well, if you please. Sir, I also am afraid. Afraid of the appetite for self-denial in Mr. Botynor."

He kissed her hands and they drew him gently on. "You'll not fear that any more," he said. . . .

But afterwards as they went up to the house while the swifts swooped and called through the dusk, "Pray, sir," says she, "what was that Sir William Zouch whispered of me when we left him?"

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Peter laughed. "Oh, a wise fellow. He said you fight well, Susan."

"Alas, sir, it takes two for a fight."

"I will do my endeavour."

"Oh, God help him, he'll do his duty," said the placid voice. She surveyed him with curiosity.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

اقتباس

(۱) بزم به باغ و راغ کش زخمه به قد چنگ زن
باده بخور غزل سرای بند گشا قبائے را

(۲) نقش دگر طراز ده آدم پخته تر بیار
لعبت خاک ساختن می نسزد خدائے را

(علامہ مرحوم)

۲۵ ۶/۱۲

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Printed in Great Britain by
Butler & Tanner Ltd.,
Frome and London

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Digitized By eGangotri

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Burq Srinagar.

Digitized By eGangotri

W. Newman & Co. Ltd. BOOKSELLERS

Collection Of Late Abdul Haq Buriq Srinagar

Digitized By eGangotri